

Washing Wildlife

The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill endangers more than 400 species of wildlife. Among them are seabirds such as gulls, gannets, and terns. Thousands of rescuers are at work protecting them from the incoming oil.



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A bird's feathers coated in oil stick together, exposing the bird's skin. Even in warm weather, oiled birds can get chilled in high winds. When they get cold, they come to shore to warm up. Then rescuers gather them up and take them to a nearby treatment facility.

Biologists and veterinarians look them over. Then the oiled birds rest and get warm before rescuers give them a bubble bath in a tub of warm, soapy water. It's a two-person job. One person holds the bird while the other scrubs its feathers and uses toothbrushes and cotton swabs to clean its head and eyes. When the tub water gets dirty, they keep washing the bird in tubs of clean water until the water stays clean. It can take 15 tubs before the bird is completely cleaned up. Then it's put under a pet drier, where it preens its feathers. Recovering birds may stay for a few days, weeks, or even months before being released back into the wild.

Do You Know?

Bird feathers are hooked together by tiny barbs that act like Velcro, forming a warm and watertight barrier.



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Cleaning Up an Oil Spill

By Ron Fridell

On April 20, an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico, the *Deepwater Horizon*, exploded, killing 11 workers. Two days later, the rig sank. Meanwhile, crude oil gushing from mile-deep leaks on the ocean floor reached the surface to form a slick of toxic pollution the size of the state of Delaware.

Satellite images showed the slick growing as it headed toward Louisiana. British Petroleum (BP) was the company operating the rig that exploded. Now BP had to quickly plug the leaks and keep the toxic slick

from contaminating the Gulf Coast, an area of wetlands rich in sea life and wildlife.

The leaks were massive. Estimates ranged from 210,000 gallons per day up to 2,520,000 gallons. This was the deepest ocean oil spill ever. Was it possible to plug massive oil leaks a mile below the surface?



The rig burned for two days and sank on April 22.

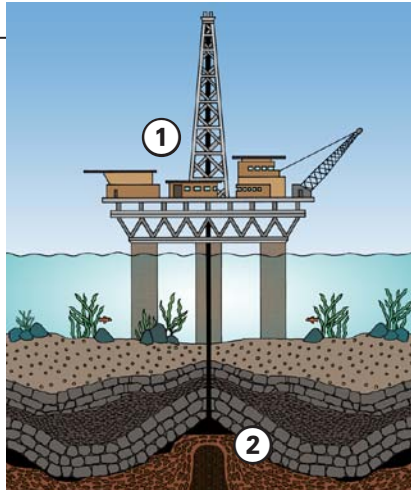
Courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard

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Oil Spill

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BP engineers and scientists tried to use a containment box to do the job. This 4-story, 98-ton concrete-and-steel container did not succeed in capping the well. And what about removing the spilled oil? There are no quick fixes. BP is burning some of it, but burning creates choking clouds of toxic smoke. Because oil floats on top of water instead of mixing with it, most of the oil sits on the ocean's surface. So BP has tried surrounding it with miles-long lines of floating boom (long tubes) and skimming it away onto ships. But the boom is made of rolled foam that wind and choppy seas tend to tear apart. BP is also shooting tons of *dispersants* onto the ocean bottom from robot submarines. These chemicals separate the oil into droplets so that bacteria can eat them up. But a BP official warned that dispersants are toxic and may do harm as well as good.



- ① An oil rig has pipes that pull oil out of layers of rock.
- ② Oil is often found deep under layers of rock in Earth's crust.

Thousands of people will keep working day and night to put these technologies to the best use possible. It will be months, maybe years, before we know the end result.

Do You Know?

In 1989, the *Exxon Valdez*, an oil tanker, ran into a reef and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of oil into Alaskan waters. It was the worst oil spill in U.S. history—until now.

Write About This!

Think about how important oil is to our everyday lives. Then think about the negative consequences of ocean drilling. Make notes on your thoughts. Then write a persuasive essay on whether we should stop or continue drilling for oil in the ocean.



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THE CONSEQUENCES

How extensive will this environmental catastrophe prove to be? Gulf Coast fishing grounds are among the world's most productive. Jimmy Rowell, a shrimp and oyster fisherman, said, "It's over for us. If this oil comes ashore, it's just over for us. Nobody wants oily shrimp." Tourism will suffer, too. Restaurant and hotel owners know that no one wants to vacation on an oily beach. Wildlife will suffer even more than people. Oil spills can be deadly for animals that live in and around ocean water. Many creatures great and small, from whales and dolphins to seagulls and crabs, are at risk.

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WOWSER!

Scientists use dish soap to clean oil-soaked wildlife.



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