

BP Gulf Oil Spill Cheat Sheet: A Timeline of Unfortunate Events

by Team Treehugger, Worldwide on 05. 3.10

BUSINESS & POLITICS



The BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig ablaze. Image: [U.S. Coast Guard](#).

It's been a strange month in the world of energy. On the heels of the [West Virginia Massey coal mine tragedy](#) followed and an [oil spill](#) caused by a coal-carrying ship near Australia, disaster struck again on the eve of Earth Day when a BP oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded. Below is a timeline of what has happened so far. We'll also be **updating this space as news develops**.

+ Tuesday, April 20 News broke that an explosion occurred at 11 p.m. EST on BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico, 52 miles southeast of the Louisiana port of Venice. According to the Coast Guard, 11 to 15 crew members were reported missing, of the total 126 workers aboard the rig at the time of the blast. The rig was drilling, but not in production.

Read more: [BIG Oil Rig Explosion Off Louisiana Coast, 11 to 15 People Missing, Infernal Blaze](#)

+ Wednesday, April 22 Helicopters and ships resumed the search for 11 missing workers. The oil rig is still burning, leaving a huge plume of smoke that is more than 30 miles long. Later that day, the fire was extinguished, after which the oil rig sank. The [LA Times reports](#) that this could "could shape up to be one of the worst U.S. offshore oil accidents in a generation." [NASA images of the oil spill](#) show aerial photos of the pluming, boiling black smoke. Environmental damage is believed to be minimal, due to the fact that Deepwater Horizon is an exploration rig, as opposed to a production rig.

Read more: [30+ Miles of Smoke: Satellite Photos Show Smoke Plume From Burning Oil Rig \(Update: It Sank\)](#)

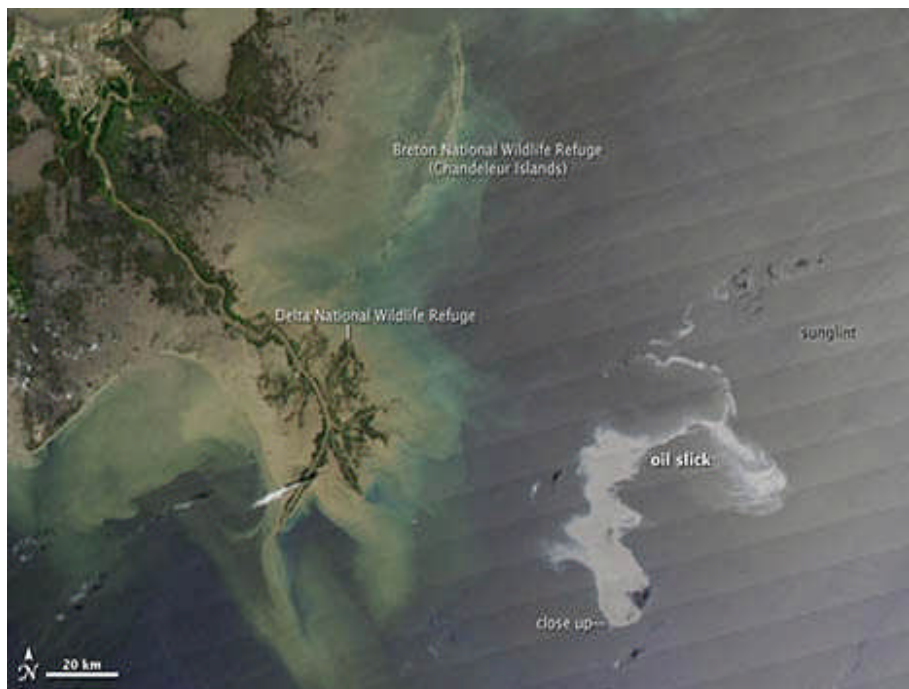


Image: NASA

+ Monday, April 26 Search-and-rescue operations have been suspended with 11 people still missing, while underwater robots have discovered at least two leaks that are dumping an estimated 1,000 barrels of oil per day in the sea. Officials warn it could take "months" to stop the what is technically a "leak," as opposed to a "spill." Weather keeps oil from moving to coast, but shrimpers and oyster farmers begin to fear for the season's catches, as Bluefin tuna spawning season in the area also encroaches.

Read more: [Oil Leaks Caused by Sunk Exploration Rig Could Take Months to Stop, Even With Robots](#)

+Wednesday, April 28 Stopping the leak is so technically challenging that experts realize it could take months. U.S. Coast Guard was to suggest best possible solution is to set the oil slick on fire. Later, they do so, releasing a huge plume into the sky.

Read more: [Burn It?! Coast Guard Now Considering Setting Oil Slick on Fire. What Are the Pros & Cons?](#)

+Thursday, April 29 It is discovered that the leak is not spewing the equivalent of 1,000 barrels of oil per day, but rather 5,000. By end of day, the oil slick has reached the Mississippi Delta.

+Friday, April 30 The [Times-Picayune reports](#) that "The state departments of Health and Hospitals and Environmental Quality said the strong odor blanketing much of coastal Louisiana and the metro New Orleans area is 'possibly' the result of the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico." Meanwhile, Obama puts a halt on any new offshore drilling (See [Obama Bans New Offshore Drilling Until Investigation on Gulf Spill Complete](#)) and an oil-industry luncheon awarding "offshore drilling safety" is postponed. BP was reported to be a finalist.

On Friday we also compiled [videos about the BP oil spill](#) and we looked at [how the oil could be cleaned up](#).

Read more: [The 'Katrina of Smell' is Attacking News Orleans Thanks to BP Oil Spill](#)

+Saturday, May 1st [SkyTruth](#), a small non-profit, analyzed radar and satellite imagery and estimated that the oil was leaking much faster than the original official estimates. The initial figure was 1,000 barrels/day, which

they successfully challenged with a new estimate of 5,000 barrels/day. But even that proved too optimistic, and on Saturday they revised their estimate to 25,000 barrels/day!



Photo: NOAA

+Monday, May 3rd BP is trying to install a shutoff valve on one of the three underwater leaks, but this is a complicated operation that might not succeed. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said the oil slick appears to be drifting toward the Alabama and Florida coasts, including the Chandeleur Islands off Louisiana's southern tip.

Pablo looks at why the oil wasn't set on fire (this was mentioned last week by the Coast Guard): "Burning such large quantities of oil would be a dirty proposition, blackening skies and severely impacting air quality in the Southern US, but wouldn't it be better than letting it coat hundreds of miles of beaches, endangered seabirds, oyster beds, and protective barrier wetlands?" [Read on](#) for the answer.

We also look at the impact of the oil spill on the critically endangered bluefin tuna population that spawns in the Gulf of Mexico.

Stay tuned for more news - we'll continue to update this post here.