



BP's Deepwater Oil Spill - Clearing the Relief Well to Restart - and Open Thread

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on July 28, 2010 - 10:35am

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Tags: [deepwater horizon](#), [oil spill](#) [[list all tags](#)]

The work in the Gulf that is moving toward a more permanent solution to the leaking well beyond the current cap on the well is moving forward at a slow and cautionary pace. In his briefing [at 2 pm Tuesday afternoon](#), Admiral Allen noted that the riser has now been connected between the Development Driller III and the BOP on the relief well. When that pipe is put into place it is full of seawater, and for a variety of reasons it is best that this is replaced with drilling mud of the required density before proceeding any further. (You may remember that it was the reverse of this process that led, in part, to the Deepwater Horizon disaster). Once this process was completed, then the pressure holding the packer in the well so that it sealed against the walls of the well, [has been released](#).

This allows flow down the drill pipe in the well, and then back up through the gap between the drill pipe and the steel and concrete casing of the well that is known as the liner. This gap that the mud will flow through is known as the annulus, and mud will be pumped down the pipe and up the annulus in a process known as circulation, which, because the mud will leave the drill pipe at the bottom of the well is known as "bottoms up." According to Mr Wells in his [later brief](#), once everyone is sure that the well is in good condition, they will pull the packer. This will likely occur tomorrow, and once that is out of the way and the well recleaned, the final length of casing for the relief well will be run down to the bottom of the well and cemented in place.

the way and the well recleaned, the final length of casing for the relief well will be run down to the bottom of the well and cemented in place.

Normally this is a job for which Halliburton would be subcontracted (as they would have been contractor for the earlier cementing of the casings higher in the well bore). However, in the brief Admiral Allen became a little coy in regard to who would actually be doing the work.

You know I don't know off ha(n)d but we can find that out and get it to you. You know a lot of these things are done by subcontractors and there are a lot of them that are out there. And they aggregate together to do what their specialty is and we will get that and pass it to you. I just don't know off hand.

The casing should be in place and cemented by the weekend, at which time the preparations for the static kill will move into performance, with Mr. Wells anticipating that the process could even start late on Sunday night.

Going back to the animation that was used the first time that the top kill was tried, the flow will, this time, include a vessel holding the mud, as well as a vessel with the high pressure mud pumps needed to inject the mud into the well through the choke and kill lines. Here is the initial animation from BP:

This is a [link](#).

I expect that this operation will follow much along the same lines, only the relative locations of the choke and kill lines may be relatively displaced by the changes in circuitry that happened during the oil collection phase of the effort.

There is increasingly less concern over the likelihood of there being an additional leak of oil from this well, into the Gulf, though that does not preclude other accidents from happening elsewhere. As Admiral Allen noted:

... the Coast Guard received a report that the uninspected towing vessel, Pere Ana C pushing the barge Captain Beauford collided with an oil and natural gas rig in the northern part of Barataria Bay south of Lafitte.

The structure itself is called C117 and that is a state owned well. We have about 6,000 feet of boom around the facility right now, there's an over flight in progress with Admiral Paul Zukunft and Governor Jindal right now and they are assessing the issues on scene, and will be available to report updates on that later today and out of the JIC and so forth.

Subsequently the well [was reported](#) to be spouting a mixture of fluids into the air from the unplugged well. Fortunately there are enough resources in the area to deal with the developing problem.

With the time since oil was flowing into the Gulf getting longer, the amount of oil that can be collected from the Deepwater Horizon well is significantly reduced, and so some of the fleet could more easily be made available if needed. The dispersal of the oil does seem to be justifying the decisions of both BP and the various agencies to rely on the dispersant at the beginning of the spill. The longer term effects of the process will not, however, be available for some time.

And in the meanwhile, BP, having agreed to pony up the \$20 billion for compensation payments, is making a business charge of \$32 billion for the spill, so that, it appears that it will not have to pay taxes on those funds, which will thus cost the taxpayer somewhere [around \\$10 billion](#). It is, after all, a business cost. But there are also going to be questions raised about how long the funds should pay for damage, if the oil is dissipating, the sands are clearing and the fishing is returning. Obviously, for example, the sand islands being raised along the coast will not be installed in time to be of much benefit for the current problem, given the speed with which [the oil is dispersing](#) so does the \$0.36 billion being spent on that project reflect the best use of funds? These issues are likely to remain very contentious as we move into the election cycle.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).