



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 11, 2010

Gulf Oil-leak Efforts Continue

Three weeks after the oil rig Deepwater Horizon exploded, the response team is still working to contain three leaks spewing oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The rig was owned by the offshore drilling contractor Transocean, Ltd., and the oil company BP leased and operated it. Both companies are working with nearly a dozen federal agencies as part of the Deepwater Horizon Response Unified Command. So far containment efforts have been fruitless because of the depth and extent of the leaks.



Transocean's chief executive officer, Steven Newman, will [testify](#) Tuesday, May 11, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources as to possible causes of the April 20 explosion. In [written testimony](#) he explains this accident has baffled investigators because BP had already finished drilling a well in the outer continental shelf off of the coast of Louisiana, reinforcing it with pipes encased in cement and sealing it. "The one thing we know with certainty is that on the evening of April 20, there was a sudden catastrophic failure of the cement, the casing, or both." Yet he maintains it is too early to settle on any definitive conclusions. "What caused that catastrophic, sudden and violent failure? Was the well properly designed? Was the well properly cemented? Were there problems with the well casing? Were all appropriate tests run on the cement and casings? These are some of the critical questions that need to be answered in the coming weeks and months."

Despite on-scene investigators' uncertainty as to cause, U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), a longtime opponent of offshore drilling, blames lack of federal regulatory oversight. The [Wall Street Journal](#) quotes the Florida democrat [saying](#), "If MMS (the Interior Department's Minerals Management Service) wasn't asleep at the wheel, it sure was letting Big Oil do most of the driving." Nelson has already introduced [legislation](#) to suspend all offshore drilling until the Deepwater Horizon investigation is complete. He also authored a bill to increase the cap on oil companies' liability for economic damages



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from \$75 million to \$10 billion.

President Obama expressed implicit support for Nelson's proposals, asking Congress to toughen caps on liability for damages. He is sending Department of Energy Secretary Chu to Houston with a team of administration officials "for an extensive dialogue with BP officials to continue to aggressively pursue potential solutions."

Meanwhile, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson is visiting Gulf states this week to assess impact of the ongoing oil leak and oversee use of dispersants on the spill. The chemicals in the dispersants should help prevent some oil from reaching the surface. Jackson joins hundreds of other federal, state, Naval, and Coast Guard officials at 14 staging areas set up along the coast to protect the shoreline. To date, approximately 10,000 personnel and more than 290 vessels make up the response team, which has deployed more than 1.1 million feet of boom — thick strands of water-repellant material that absorb or contain oil spills — at the staging areas.

BP is offering training to volunteers interested in helping with shoreline clean up. The program is in conjunction with the Texas Engineering Extension Service and is approved by OSHA and the U.S. Coast Guard. The oil company also reports it has not denied any of the 5,710 property damage claims filed so far and has disbursed \$2.4 million in response.

Photo: AP Images

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