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America's Gulf Crisis - Ongoing Coverup and Denial

By Stephen Lendman

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On October 22, AP reported that over 7,000 square miles of Gulf waters off Florida's Panhandle were declared oil-free and reopened to fishing. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 96% of Gulf waters are now safe and reopened, spokeswoman Jane Lubchenco saying, "Our tests continue to reveal seafood from the reopened areas is safe to eat." Others disagree. More on that below.

The newly opened area is about 60 miles east of the Macondo wellhead. About 9,400 square miles of fishing waters remain closed, 4% of federal waters, down from 37% earlier.

From the start, The New Times provided cover for BP and the administration, at first denying the existence of a spill, then minimizing the disaster. On May 3, writers John Broder and Tom Zeller Jr. headlined, "Gulf Oil Spill Is Bad, but How Bad?" saying "news analysis" indicates it's really not serious after all, when evidence showed the potential for disaster.

On August 4, writer Justin Gillis headlined, "US Finds Most Oil From Spill Poses Little Additional Risk," saying:

"The government is expected to announce....that three-quarters of the oil from the Deepwater Horizon leak has already evaporated, dispersed, been captured or otherwise eliminated - and that much of the rest is so diluted that it does not seem to pose much additional risk of harm."

This at a time, and later on, when independent research showed most oil remained. Corexit dispersants increased toxicity manyfold. Seafood was contaminated and unsafe. Vast areas of the Gulf and shorelines were (and continue to be) hazardous, and the risk to wildlife and human health was extreme. In other words, by downplaying the disaster, The Times defended government and BP lies, fearing the April 20 explosion provided "new

fodder" for opponents.

Other Times reports highlighted the vanishing oil, low concentrations of deep sea toxic compounds, and conditions slowly returning to normal. In an October 12 update, The Times said:

"...evidence is increasing that through a combination of luck (a fortunate shift in ocean currents that kept much of the oil away from shore) and ecological circumstance (the relatively warm waters that increased the breakdown rate of the oil), the gulf region appears to have escaped the direst predictions of the spring."

"And preliminary reports (suggest) the damage already done (may) be significantly less than was feared - less, in fact, than the destruction from the much smaller Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989."

In fact, the truth is mirror opposite. BP and administration officials are responsible for the greatest environmental crime in history, an ongoing disaster, affecting vast parts of the Gulf, coastal waters from Texas to Florida, most or perhaps all wildlife, and the health of millions of residents, no longer safe since April.

Drill Baby Drill

On October 12, the May imposed moratorium was lifted, six weeks ahead of its scheduled November 30 date, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar declaring:

"We are open for business....We have made and continue to make significant progress in reducing the risks associated with deepwater drilling."
(Therefore), I have decided that it is now appropriate to lift the suspension on deepwater drilling for those operators that are able to clear the higher bar that we have set."

In fact, so-called "new rules" mimic old ones. Drilling remains unregulated and unsafe, so it's just a matter of time before the next disaster strikes, besides natural seepage and annual hundreds of smaller, unreported spills. Cumulatively over time, their toxicity destroys global water and human health. Moreover, according to former NOAA supervisory researcher Jeff Short:

"Once you have a spill, you are pretty much screwed. That's because oil spreads on water at a rate of one-half football field per second. Recovery can take decades," so calling the coast clear and water safe is willfully deceptive, echoed by the dominant media, The New York Times in the lead.

Lies, Damn Lies, and Coverup

The level is staggering, numerous reports countering BP and administration claims. On September 3, Boston Chemical Data Corp. laboratory findings, commissioned by the United Commercial Fishermen's Association, revealed

toxic Corexit levels in test samples, meaning, besides oil contamination, Gulf seafood is extremely hazardous and unsafe.

Moreover, though BP denies it, Corexit spraying continues, mostly at night but some during day time. Fishermen report seeing it, in some cases hit by its mist. Reports say BP hired out-of-state contractors using unregistered boats, besides nightly aerial spraying. The administration's response to the entire disaster remains firm - coverup and denial, helped by a major media blackout after BP reported sealing the Macondo well on September 19.

In early October, however, four working reports issued by investigators from the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling revealed systemic coverup and censorship to suppress the disaster's magnitude, one very much ongoing.

They explained that stonewalling began in April and continued, one report concluding:

"By initially underestimating the amount of oil flow and then, at the end of the summer, appearing to underestimate the amount of oil remaining in the gulf, the federal government created the impression that it was either not fully competent to handle the spill or not fully candid with the American people about the scope of the problem."

In fact, willful misinformation was released. In contrast, independent researchers produced accurate findings. BP, the administration, and major media accounts suppressed them, including evidence of criminal negligence.

Local Reports Exposing the Big Lie

On October 23, New Orleans Times-Picayune writer Bob Marshall headlined "Massive stretches of weathered oil spotted in Gulf of Mexico," saying:

"Just three days after (Coast Guard admiral Thad Allen, BP's front man) declared little recoverable surface oil remained in the Gulf of Mexico....Boat captains working the BP clean-up effort" reported seeing it, confirmed by Times-Picayune photojournalist Matt Hinton in a fly-over. In addition, "fishermen's groups....insist their members have" spotted it all along, refuting official claims that don't explain large fish kills, big enough to suggest widespread toxicity, affecting humans as well as wildlife.

On the six month anniversary of the disaster, marine biologist Riki Ott reported "people (are) now dropping dead," adding:

"I am dealing with about 3 - 4 autopsies right now....I know of people who's esophagus' are de-solving, disintegrating....I know of people with 4.75% of their lung capacity, with enlarged hearts....All of these people have oil (and dispersants) in their bodies."

She added that "4 to 5 million people in the Gulf were exposed to oil (and dispersants) at dangerous levels that is going to have incredible public health ramifications...and possibly force the President out of office for lies." In fact, he should be impeached and prosecuted for war crimes abroad and ones against humanity at home.

Deaths continue to be reported as well as people finding volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and other toxins in their blood. According to one observer, corruption, coverup and poisoning are occurring in plain sight. The entire region is affected and will be for decades, the dirty secret BP, government officials, and major media won't explain.

Local accounts, however, are disturbing. On October 21, New Orleans WWL-TV reported:

"The oil is not evaporating. It's not dissipating. It's sitting there," according to PJ Hahn, Plaquemines Parish Coastal Zone Management Department head.

On October 20, AP reported Byron Encalade, president of the Louisiana Oystermen Association, saying "oyster beds are all dead or dying...I'm very pessimistic about it."

In early September, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources officials found 80 - 90% of oysters dead, citing no cause. Clearly oil and Corexit are responsible.

On October 21, Cynthia Sarthou, Gulf Restoration Network executive director, said:

"There is still so much oil and dispersant in the environment, and the Gulf has not yet begun to heal because we have yet to determine what the injury is that it has suffered," and its extent. For sure it's massive and destructive.

On October 16, the Louisiana Shrimp Association's Clint Guidry called using Corexit a "horrific mistake," adding:

"Potential ecosystem collapse caused by toxic dispersant use during this disaster will have immediate and long term effects on the Gulf's fishing communities' ability to sustain our culture and heritage."

On October 22, a pilot said he "was surprised (and saddened) to witness a seemingly unrelenting tide of oil hammering our beaches, bays, and estuaries."

Other recent reports included:

-- fishermen sprayed while sleeping in groups of boats tied together;

-- a boat captain, Lori DeAngelis, said her vagina and anus are bleeding, adding: "This thing is killing me;"

-- Lorrie Williams in Ocean Springs, MS said the oil sheen is "a lot worse" now than earlier, calling it an "absolute mess;"

-- tides keep washing up tar balls and sheen on coastal beaches and other areas;

-- large deposits are found buried in sand;

-- researchers found "vast volumes" of oil on the seafloor, including "thick raw crude;"

-- a massive shelf of exposed tar was found on Pensacola beaches;

-- fishermen said "we're starving; there are no fish in the waters" or not enough; and "any fish we would see, we would not eat;" and

-- various other reports were just as disturbing - clear evidence of an ongoing disaster because of the worst ever environmental crime.

A Final Comment

On June 14, as conditions worsened, AP reported that Obama "pronounce(d) Gulf seafood safe to eat....things are going to return to normal....I am confident that we're going to be able to leave the Gulf Coast in better shape than it was before."

In fact, then, now, and for decades, contamination will remain, hazardous to wildlife and human health, what he knew yet lied and said otherwise, fronting for BP and other industry giants.

Oil and dispersants contaminate much, perhaps the entire Gulf. It's now poisoned and will remain potentially lethal for decades, maybe generations. Nothing in it should be ingested. Millions in the region are at risk. Families with small children should leave. No one should swim in coastal waters or eat any Gulf seafood, perhaps ever again. Responsible officials should ban it.

Instead, Obama, the Interior Department, NOAA, the Coast Guard, state governors, coastal mayors, regional health officials, BP, and major media reports gave the all-clear, saying conditions are nearly again normal, claiming the worst of the crisis was avoided.

In fact, a silent epidemic of cancers and other diseases will ravage coastal and inland areas for decades. The livelihoods of many residents are lost, and southern Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida may never be the same again, at least not for those now living there.

Moreover, 4,000 Gulf oil platforms now operate, the deepest and most hazardous by a consortium of companies, including BP. In addition, about 50,000 old wells pockmark the seabed, thousands with temporary or failing

plugs believed to be leaking oil, gas and other toxins.

Yet deepwater drilling continues. Oil and gas pipelines keep compromising Gulf marshes, causing 15,000 acres to be lost annually, eroding wetlands and other areas. According to experts, unless restorative changes are made, the entire ecosystem will be lost in a generation.

On November 2, consider that before voting. Remember Obama's complicity in the greatest ever environmental crime, but don't imagine Republicans or Tea Party extremists will fix things. They're all beholden to power, not popular interests at a time they're being systematically eroded to divert money for militarism, imperial wars, bankers, BP, and other corporate favorites, ordinary people and ecological considerations be damned.

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