NEWS

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BP SPILL WAS A GREATER DISASTER THAN PUBLIC KNEW

Bellevue WA: A new study shows how BP and the Federal government dramatically understated the amount of oil and gas gushing into the Gulf of Mexico after the *Deepwater Horizon* exploded. The study, "Impacts, Perception, and Policy Implications of the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil and Gas Disaster" by MCBI's Dr. Elliott Norse and SkyTruth's John Amos, appears in a special issue of *Environmental Law Reporter News and Analysis* It can be downloaded at http://www.mcbi.org/publications/pub_pdfs/Norse-and-Amos-2010.pdf.

The article chronicles 9 significant observations made by SkyTruth and other independent analysts using satellite images, including:

- Our calculation, released just one week after the rig exploded, that the spill was at least **20 times larger** than the official estimate and had already surpassed the *Exxon Valdez* incident as our nation's worst oil spill
- The surprising discovery of another nearby oil spill, a chronic leak from storm-damaged wells, unrelated to the BP disaster
- Visual confirmation of oil entering the Gulf's Loop Current
- A cumulative BP spill footprint spanning 68,000 square miles of the Gulf's surface, larger than the state of Oklahoma

Moreover, the authors point out that public attention was overly focused on the easily visible impacts of oil on the beaches and marshes, not the unseen impacts far offshore, in the depths, where the spill was occurring.

"To truly understand the full damage caused by this spill, we mustn't forget to look offshore, in the deep waters of the Gulf, where as much as half of the oil – and most of the natural gas – that spewed from the BP well remained in the black depths, out of sight," said geologist John Amos, founder and President of SkyTruth.

"And it will take years of nonstop field studies to discover and document the impact of this deep-sea spill on the ecosystems and human communities of the Gulf Coast," said marine biologist Dr. Elliott Norse, founder and President of Marine Conservation Biology Institute.

The authors pose 8 important questions about the hidden subsea impacts that must be addressed and applied to future ocean policy and spill-response decisionmaking. Mr. Amos believes "The tools to

monitor and measure subsea impacts from a spill, and the scientists who know how to use those tools, need to be put on the job and continually supported so we're ready to respond immediately when the next major spill happens."

Dr. Norse offers 9 major conclusions from this tragic experience and 5 recommendations for safer, environmentally smarter offshore drilling and ocean management policy. He emphasizes the importance of incorporating offshore energy development into the new National Ocean Policy using ecosystem-based spatial planning.

"The BP/Deepwater Horizon oil and gas disaster tells us that things can go wrong, with terrible consequences. Now oil companies want to drill in the Arctic Ocean, where the conditions are far more severe than in the Gulf of Mexico," said Dr. Norse. "If oil companies can't stop a gusher in good weather near the world's biggest concentration of oil service vessels, we mustn't delude ourselves into believing they could stop a gusher under the ice during a fierce polar storm in the remote Arctic Ocean" Dr. Norse added. "We shouldn't even consider drilling in the Arctic Ocean until Americans are sure it's completely safe" he said.

Dr. Norse was the Environmental Protection Agency's expert on impacts of oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico during the late 1970s, before he founded MCBI. Mr. Amos spent 10 years working for companies that help the oil and gas industry find new places to drill before he founded SkyTruth.

Like the similar *Montara* blowout and spill off Australia last year, the BP / *Deepwater Horizon* disaster demonstrated again that expert independent analysts can contribute crucial, timely information to the public during an environmental crisis. "For future pollution detection and monitoring, it's critical that we add radar imaging satellites to the nation's civilian fleet so that we no longer rely on foreign-operated satellites to provide this information," Mr. Amos said.

Dr. Norse cautions "Even with our advanced technology and the regulations that were in force then, America experienced the worst environmental catastrophe in our history, and the world's worst-ever accidental oil spill. Our enemies didn't do this to us; we did it to ourselves, by letting the oil industry operate without appropriate government scrutiny and public transparency. The recent revelations about inadequate cementing--just one of many ways that an oil well can fail-- underscore the importance of working diligently to minimize future catastrophic spills."

SKYTRUTH

SkyTruth uses satellite images, remote sensing and digital mapping to investigate and illustrate environmental conditions and incidents worldwide. Founded in 2001, SkyTruth is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Shepherdstown WV. *Go to* **www.skytruth.org** *to view more.*

MCBI
MARINE CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE

Marine Conservation Biology Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to securing protection for the world's marine ecosystems. Founded in 1996, MCBI is headquartered in Bellevue WA, and has offices in Glen Ellen CA and Washington DC. *Go to* **www.mcbi.org** *to view more.*