



### Lead Stories

Oil spill in Gulf of Mexico reported to have reached coast; offshore drilling ban announced by Obama administration

Bomb scare closes Times Square, New York

### Oil spill in Gulf of Mexico reported to have reached coast; offshore drilling ban announced by Obama administration

As reports came out yesterday that the oil spill caused by the explosion and sinking of an oil rig in Gulf of Mexico near Louisiana had reached the coast, the Obama administration announced a ban on all future offshore drilling at least until the investigation into the incident is completed.

Early Friday morning, the US Coast Guard received reports that oil from the spill had washed ashore, and while officials have not confirmed the reports, winds continue to push the slick northward towards land, and conditions are deteriorating, making cleanup of the spill increasingly difficult. The Coast Guard said it was planning to conduct a flyover of the slick to determine its extent sometime on Friday. According to the National Weather Service, strong winds and thunderstorms are predicted to continue through the weekend, hindering cleanup efforts.

Also early on Friday morning, a senior government official, White House advisor David Axelrod, said that the government was immediately banning all new offshore drilling until the investigation into the spill had been

completed. His announcement came just after a month the administration relaxed restrictions of offshore drilling.

The operation to clean up the spill has accelerated in recent days, with the US Navy having joined the effort, as well as resources from the Coast Guard and British Petroleum (BP), the lessor of the rig at the time of the explosion. The total assets deployed in the operation are estimated to be around 1,900 people and more than 300 ships and aircraft. Additionally, six remotely operated submarines are trying to stem the leaks, which now number three, at the ocean's floor.

On Wednesday, the estimated amount of oil spilling from the damaged well was raised to 5,000 barrels, or around 210,000 gallons, a day, five times the original estimate of a thousand gallons a day. This figure was later revised upwards again to 25,000 barrels (1.05 million gallons) per day. So far, the cleanup operation has laid around 210,000 feet of containment booms to protect vulnerable wildlife refuges on the Gulf Coast, and an additional 66,000 feet of boom has been provided by the US Navy. Since the beginning of the operation, more than 18,000 gallons of an oil/water mix have been recovered from the ocean, and after a successful test burn of oil, plans are being made to scale the burns up. According to a BP official, "We believe we can now scale that up and burn between 500 and 1,000 barrels at a time." The first test burned around 100 barrels of oil.

Despite the efforts, many are still worried about the potential consequences of the spill, and officials said that the damage could

end up being more than that caused by the Exxon Valdez oil spill 20 years ago, which spilled 11 million gallons of oil into Alaska's Prince William Sound. One analyst said that he expected "that movement is going to continue to stress and fatigue the pipe and create more leaks," adding that "this is not on a good trajectory."

BP has developed two options to stop the flow of oil at the source, but both are expected to take at least weeks to complete. The first option is to lower large structures over the leak, which would allow the oil to be safely transported to the surface. BP is building one such structure, but it isn't expected to be completed for at least several weeks. The second option is to drill a second well which would then plug the leak at the source. A well for this purpose will begin to be drilled within two days, although it could be up to three months before the leak is completely plugged.

### Bomb scare closes Times Square, New York

A car containing a bomb was discovered in Times Square, New York City, causing the evacuation of streets surrounding the area.

Reports say the vehicle, a Nissan Pathfinder, parked outside a theatre on 45th Street and Seventh Avenue, had smoke coming out of the back at around 6:30 p.m EDT (10:30 p.m. UTC). Unconfirmed reports say an unknown man ran away from the car. A roughly square area of the city, its boundaries formed by 43rd and 48th Street and 7th and 8th Avenue, was evacuated.

The New York Police

Department bomb squad was called in and were able to retrieve the package using a robot. Officials removed gunpowder, consumer-grade fireworks, two five-gallon cans of gasoline, three propane tanks, electrical wiring, and two clocks with batteries that apparently were fashioned as one or two detonators. The bomb has been described as "amateurish". No casualties or injuries were reported.

As of yet police have not named a suspect and are reviewing security footage. The car used by the suspect was stolen and had a non-matching license plate; the legitimate owner of the plates does not appear to have been involved in the incident.

President Barack Obama has congratulated the speediness with which the New York Police Department responded.

New York has been in a state of constant alert since the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. In September 2009, a plot to attack the New York Subway with suicide bombers was uncovered by police. In December 2009, Times Square was evacuated due to a illegally parked van, although it contained no explosives.

### Commons Picture of the Day



A Green shield bug (*Palomena prasina*). Photo taken: village Knistushki, Belarus. Photo: Darius Baužys

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