

Fw: FRTG/spill query

Mark

Mark Sogge
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----- Forwarded by Mark K Sogge/DO/USGS/DOI on 08/05/2010 02:17 PM -----

From: Clarice E Ransom/DO/USGS/DOI
To: "Rodriguez, Julie" <Julie_Rodriguez@ios.doi.gov>
Cc: Barbara W Wainman/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS, Anne-Berry Wade/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS,
Mark K Sogge/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS, Vic Hines <vhines@usgs.gov>
Date: 07/12/2010 10:33 AM
Subject: RE: FRTG/spill query

Hey Julie:

Per your request, here is the link and the editorial that ran on Friday.

I will have an FRTG statement/talking points for you by early afternoon.

www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/editorials/ct-edit-oil-20100708,0,718660.story

chicagotribune.com
Counting barrels
6:51 PM CDT, July 8, 2010

BP officials have told The Wall Street Journal they should be able to stop the flow of the disastrous Gulf oil gusher by July 27, weeks earlier than had been projected. But BP shouldn't be surprised if the collective reaction is: Just tell us when it's done.

BP has lost its credibility on promises and projections. The company still hasn't adequately addressed a question that should have been answered at the start: Just how much oil has been spilling into the Gulf?

Given the fishy estimates so far, it's a wonder anybody believes anything about the ongoing disaster.

The first estimate after the Deepwater Horizon explosion on April 20 pegged the oil flow at 1,000 barrels a day. Not long after, the estimate rose to 5,000. It was raised again to somewhere between 12,000 and 19,000, then 25,000 to 40,000 and, currently, 35,000 to 60,000.

That final tally is subject to change — for the worse, if the past is any guide. Some skeptical independent experts peg the output at 100,000 barrels.

It's easy to imagine the technical difficulty of measuring a runaway well under 5,000 feet of water, but come on. At one point, BP reported capturing more oil each day than supposedly was escaping.

Such obvious baloney engenders public anger and cynicism. Americans need information they can trust from BP and their government. Both parties have disappointed.

The damage goes beyond mere disillusionment, because to some extent the flow rate influences the cleanup. It's a crucial input for oceanographic models that predict where oil will arise. How much will wash up onshore, and where? What's the best way to deploy the fleet of skimmers? Knowing the flow rate can help clear up those mysteries.

The first 1,000-barrel estimate came from the oil giant, which had a practical reason to lowball it: The amount of oil spilled typically determines the size of federal fines and damages in related court cases. The second estimate of 5,000 barrels, from the Obama administration, depended on aerial observations. It fell way short, giving the American public a false impression of the disaster's vast scale.

The larger official estimates came from the Flow Rate Technical Group, a collection of scientists the federal government belatedly appointed to analyze undersea videos, sonar data and pressure measurements that increasingly have become available. Its latest report is scheduled to appear shortly, though the bottom-line numbers aren't expected to change anytime soon from 35,000 to 60,000 barrels.

A little wiggle room would be understandable, since the oil flow is a moving target. BP's attempt to cut and cap its damaged riser pipe, for example, almost certainly boosted the output mid-spill.

But a 25,000-barrel spread from low to high is so enormous that it smacks of a cop-out: Should the Technical Group just say between one and 100,000 barrels are flowing, and leave it at that?

Eventually, government-appointed experts will make a final determination of the amount spilled. That can't come soon enough, and the Obama administration should push harder for a precise and plausible reckoning. Federal watchdogs also need to audit BP's claims about how much oil is being collected: It would be in the company's interest to inflate those recovery figures.

Unfortunately, the early mischaracterizations of the spill's magnitude stand to undermine the credibility of any future tally. "There's skepticism," noted Steve Wereley, a Purdue University engineering professor and Technical Group member. "I feel bad. The waters have been tainted."

How tainted? Who knows?

We need a better answer.

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Clarice Nassif Ransom

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From: "Rodriguez, Julie" <Julie_Rodriguez@ios.doi.gov>

To: "Ransom, Clarice E" <cransom@usgs.gov>

Date: 07/12/2010 11:26 AM

Subject: RE: FRTG/spill query

Did he run a story? If so, can you track it down and send it to me?

Thanks,

Julie

From: Clarice E Ransom [mailto:cransom@usgs.gov]
Sent: Thursday, July 08, 2010 1:00 PM
To: Rodriguez, Julie
Cc: Wainman, Barbara W; Wade, Anne-Berry; Hines, Vic; Sogge, Mark K
Subject: Re: FRTG/spill query

Julie:

I spoke to Greg a few minutes ago. He did not reveal anything to me except that they are planning to run an editorial tomorrow; he talked to FRTG member Steve Wereley, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Purdue University; and he wants to have a conversation with you directly. You may want to call him.

Thanks.

Sincerely,

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From: "Rodriguez, Julie" <Julie_Rodriguez@ios.doi.gov>
To: "Ransom, Clarice E" <cransom@usgs.gov>
Date: 07/08/2010 11:15 AM
Subject: Re: FRTG/spill query

Clarice,

Can you please call him back and have him send the questions via e-mail.

Thanks.

Julie

From: Clarice E Ransom <cransom@usgs.gov>
To: Rodriguez, Julie
Sent: Thu Jul 08 10:48:44 2010
Subject: Fw: FRTG/spill query

Julie:

I am resending this - the original bounced back -- I hope this one reaches you.

Sincerely,

Clarice Nassif Ransom
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----- Forwarded by Clarice E Ransom/DO/USGS/DOI on 07/08/2010 10:48 AM -----

From: Clarice E Ransom/DO/USGS/DOI
To: "Burns, Greg" <gburns@tribune.com>
Cc: Julie Rodriguez/OCO/OS/DOI@DOI, Barbara W Wainman/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS,
Anne-Berry Wade/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS, Vic Hines/DO/USGS/DOI@USGS
Date: 07/08/2010 10:33 AM
Subject: Re: FRTG/spill query

Greg:

Thank you so much for your email. Julie Rodriguez from DOI is coordinating inquiries regarding the FRTG. I am copying her on this email. Her phone number is 202-208-2409.

Sincerely,

Clarice Nassif Ransom
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From: "Burns, Greg" <gburns@tribune.com>
To: "cransom@usgs.gov" <cransom@usgs.gov>
Date: 07/07/2010 05:40 PM
Subject: FRTG/spill query

I'm an editorial writer from the Chicago Tribune with a few questions about the Flow Rate Technical Group...can you give me a ring?

Many thanks,
Greg Burns
Chicago Tribune
312-222-3531
gburns@tribune.com