

Gulf of Mexico Katrina cleanup continues

March 1 2006

Crews are frantically trying to repair damage caused by last year's Gulf of Mexico hurricanes, with the 2006 hurricane season only four months away.

It's been six months since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed or damaged more than 167 offshore oil platforms and 183 pipelines with winds up to 175 mph and waves higher than eight-story buildings. More than a quarter of the region's oil output is still shut down.

Gulf Coast refineries account for nearly half the nation's domestic capacity and most of them were affected by the storms.

Several factors are slowing recovery efforts, including a shortage of ships and qualified crews, marine technicians and divers, The New York Times reported Wednesday. Also, finding and fixing broken pipelines along the Gulf's shallows is especially difficult because the water's opaqueness forces divers to blindly feel the ground with their hands until they find a missing section of pipeline, The Times reported.

The 2005 hurricane season was the most active in more than 70 years, producing 25 storms -- an all-time record. Preliminary predictions for the 2006 season, which begins June 1, are calling for more above-average hurricane activity.

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