

# Clean-up tools may help protect wetlands from Gulf of Mexico oil spill

May 20 2010

---

With oil from the big Gulf of Mexico spill threatening fragile coastal wetlands, clean-up crews are about to discover whether a combination of old and new clean-up methods will help limit the environmental damage. That's the topic of an article in Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN), ACS' weekly newsmagazine.

C&EN Assistant Editor Michael Torrice notes that scientists and engineers are using three basic tools to try to clean up the spill, in which millions of gallons of oil escaped into the ocean from an oil rig following a pipe rupture. Those tools include mopping-up the oil with absorbent pads called "skimmers," burning the oil in a controlled fashion, and breaking-up the oil into smaller particles using chemicals called dispersants. Despite these efforts, massive amounts of oil remain.

But scientists are also investigating new clean-up methods. One involves applying dispersants under water to prevent the oil from rising to the surface and forming emulsions, reddish-brown clumps of an oil and water mixture that are extremely difficult to clean up. In recent tests of this approach, remotely operated underwater "robots" injected the dispersants directly into the leaking oil plume. When oil hits the shore, scientists might rely on a more standard method and spray the wetlands with fertilizers that can boost the growth of naturally-occurring, oil-chomping bacteria that are found in the area. Whether or not this multipronged clean-up approach will save the wetlands remains to be seen.

**More information:** "Cleaning up the Gulf Oil Spill", This story is available at [pubs.acs.org/cen/science/88/8820sci3.html](https://pubs.acs.org/cen/science/88/8820sci3.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

Citation: Clean-up tools may help protect wetlands from Gulf of Mexico oil spill (2010, May 20) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-05-clean-up-tools-wetlands-gulf-mexico.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.