

Obama vows help as BP sees oil spill progress

June 5 2010, by Allen Johnson



Marine One with US President Barack Obama aboard and a second support helicopter fly to New Orleans after Obama met with local business owners and residents in Grand Isle, Louisiana. US President Barack Obama has promised to use "every resource" to help those affected by the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, as Americans await news of BP's latest containment effort.

US President Barack Obama promised on Saturday to use "every resource" to help those affected by the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, as Americans awaited news of BP's latest containment effort.

In his weekly radio address, broadcast from Grand Isle, Louisiana, a community bearing the brunt of the spill, Obama pledged ongoing attention to the disaster.

"So we will continue to leverage every resource at our disposal to protect coastlines, to clean up the oil, to hold BP and other companies accountable for damages," he said.

Obama, who was in Louisiana Friday for his third trip to the region since the spill began, also promised to do all he could "to begin to restore the bounty and beauty of this region -- and to aid the hardworking people of the Gulf as they rebuild their businesses and communities."

As Obama promised assistance, oil spill-stricken [Gulf of Mexico](#) residents anxiously awaited news about BP's latest effort to contain the massive leak, now the worst environmental disaster in US history.

The firm has lowered a containment vessel over a leaking ruptured well-pipe allowing oil to collect and be siphoned up via a tube to the Enterprise, a container ship on the surface.

The US official overseeing the response to the spill, Admiral Thad Allen, was to provide an update on the process at 1445 GMT, amid uncertainty about just how much oil was being collected.

"The flow of oil and gas to the Enterprise was shut down for three hours overnight," said Coast Guard spokesman First Class Petty Officer Zach Zubricki.

"It resumed at 3:30 am (0730 GMT)," he told AFP, saying he had no information on how much oil was being captured.

An estimated 20 million gallons of crude has poured into the Gulf since an April 20 explosion tore through the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig, 50 miles (80 kilometers) off Louisiana.

Eleven workers were killed in the blast, and Obama will meet their families in a White House ceremony next week.

The president said the spill had "upended whole communities," and local residents were angry not just about lost income, but because of "the

wrenching recognition that this time their lives may never be the same."

The scale of the disaster forced Obama to postpone a trip to Australia and Indonesia for the second time, as shocking images of seabirds writhing in oil along the Louisiana coast blanketed US television networks and the front pages of newspapers, underscoring the rising environmental toll.

Spreading in oily ribbons, the slick is now threatening Alabama, Mississippi and Florida after contaminating more than 125 miles (200 kilometers) of Louisiana coastline.

But Obama said the cap that BP placed over the well late Thursday appeared to be "making progress."

BP chief operating officer Doug Suttles said the cap -- an upside-down, funnel-shaped container -- would capture the "vast majority" of the oil.

On Friday, Allen said the cap was collecting about 1,000 barrels a day of oil, but that is far short of the estimated 12,000 to 19,000 barrels a day spewing into the sea and a live video feed showed clouds of oil still gushing from the pipe.

Obama acknowledged that "regardless of the outcome of this attempt, there will still continue to be some spillage until the relief wells are completed."

He noted that his administration had ordered BP to pay economic injury claims and sent the company a preliminary bill for 69 million dollars to pay back some of the costs of the clean-up.

He also promised to do everything necessary to prevent such environmental disasters from happening again, adding: "If laws are

inadequate, laws will be changed."

US authorities have reopened a section of more than 16,000 square miles (41,000 square kilometers) of fishing area off the Florida coast, closed on June 2 as a precaution, though 32 percent of the area remains closed.

At the same time, BP chief executive Tony Hayward announced the formation of a team to work with locals and officials in the aftermath of the cleanup, led by one of the [oil](#) giant's managing directors, Bob Dudley, a US citizen.

The appointment is a sign that the cleanup and looming legal battles will likely last for years. The CEO has faced growing anger about a series of blunders.

BP said it will be sending a second advance payment during June to individuals and businesses along the Gulf Coast to compensate for the loss of income, bringing its total to 84 million dollars.

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