

# Million dollar contest launched in US to clean oil spill

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Wendy Schmidt, president of The Schmidt Family Foundation, speaks during a press conference to announce its sixth major competition the "Oil Cleanup X CHALLENGE" at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. A US foundation that helped launch private spaceflight Thursday turned its gaze and pocketbook towards Earth, unveiling a 1.4-million-dollar contest to find new ways to clean up oil spills.

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The year-long Wendy Schmidt [Oil](#) Cleanup X Challenge, named for the wife of [Google](#) chairman Eric Schmidt who put up the 1.4-million-dollar purse and the [X Prize Foundation](#) which is organizing the competition, kicks off Sunday.

Frustrated at watching "the messy, uncoordinated" attempts to mop up oil from the massive BP leak in the Gulf of Mexico using outdated technology, the contest aims to inspire new ways to clean up future spills, Schmidt said.

"With nearly 4,000 active drilling platforms in the Gulf alone, and more than 10,000 oil platforms across the globe and millions of barrels of oil being transported every day by tankers, it's not a question of 'if' there is another spill but 'when,'" she added.

She argued that "we need to come up with better ways to respond quickly and to minimize the harm we are causing to marine life, coastal wetlands and beaches, and to our livelihoods."

Teams will submit a blueprint for spill-fighting technology online on the website of the X Prize Foundation ([xprize.org](http://xprize.org)).

The foundation has run other "incentive competitions" with multi-million-dollar purses, including one in 2004 that saw Burt Rutan build and fly a private vehicle into space.

A panel of experts will evaluate the entries for feasibility, cost, how well they lend themselves to large scale deployment, efficiency and eco-friendliness among other criteria, and the field will be whittled down by mid-2011 to a few teams of finalists.

Those teams will put their inventions to the test in a head-to-head competition at the National Oil Spill Response Research and Renewable Energy Test Facility in New Jersey.

The teams will have to clean up oil-tainted water, and the winners will get at least one million dollars. Runners-up and third place teams will earn 300,000 and 100,000 dollars respectively.

X Prize Foundation chairman Peter Diamandis expects hundreds of entries to the competition which aims to "spur small teams with big ideas to solve big challenges."

Other X Prize competitions currently under way include one to land a robot on the moon, one to build a safe, affordable car that gets at least 100 miles per gallon and another to sequence 100 human genomes in 10 days.

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