

# Engineers prepare to seal ruptured oil well

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An oil-soaked Laughing Gull is cleaned at the Fort Jackson Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Buras, Louisiana. Engineers Saturday readied a plan to permanently seal a damaged Gulf of Mexico well, despite delays to the process caused by debris left behind by a recent tropical storm.

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As the work continued, incoming BP boss Bob Dudley vowed his company would not abandon residents affected by the spill after the well is finally sealed.

BP hopes to drown the well in an operation dubbed a "static kill," in which mud and [cement](#) will be injected down into the ruptured wellhead via a cap installed on July 15.

Dudley on Friday said the operation had been pushed back a day, saying "we are hopeful by Tuesday the static kill will have been performed."

The US pointman on the crisis, Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen, said Friday the delay was needed to allow engineers to clear debris from the damaged wellhead caused by Tropical Storm Bonnie, which briefly halted spill operations.

But BP senior vice president Kent Wells said the company was confident the static kill would proceed successfully.

A cap in place for two weeks has shown no sign of leaks, "giving us more confidence that this well has integrity," which is a positive sign for the operation, Wells said at a technical briefing Friday.

Wells said BP hopes the static kill will be able to overcome the flow of oil, but that a second sealing method -- via an intercept through a relief well -- would go ahead afterwards regardless.

BP said the relief well is likely to intersect the existing well deep below the [ocean floor](#) within eight to 10 days, allowing the second sealing process -- a bottom kill -- by the end of August.

Making his first trip to the region since being named to replace outgoing BP CEO Tony Hayward, Dudley said Friday the firm's focus would shift to long-term recovery for the region now that spill is being contained.

"We've had some good news on the oil... but that doesn't mean we're done," Dudley told reporters in Mississippi, one of the five states hit by

the massive oil spill.

"We'll be here for years," he said, as BP announced a 100-million-dollar charitable fund to aid unemployed rig workers who are experiencing economic hardship due to the US government's ongoing moratorium on deepwater drilling.

Dudley will take over as BP's chief executive on October 1, when Hayward, who was widely criticized for his handling of the crisis, hands over the reins.

With the focus now moving towards mitigating the long-term impact of the worst-ever US oil spill, Dudley said there would be signs that the operation was changing.

Miles of protective boom will be withdrawn from coastlines, and fewer clean-up crews in hazmat suits would be seen on beaches as oil stopped washing ashore.

"So you'll probably see that kind of a pullback. But commitment, absolutely no pullback," he pledged.

It remains unknown just how much oil has spilled into the Gulf since the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig exploded and sank in April, killing 11 workers. Best estimates put the amount at between three to 5.3 million barrels.

Allen said a team of experts was carrying out an "oil budget" to calculate how much was released, how much was captured and how much has evaporated, adding he hoped the report would be released in the coming days.

"It's something we ultimately need to know," Allen said.

In another encouraging sign, the NOAA said southern Florida and the US eastern seaboard was not likely to experience any effects from the remaining surface oil, as had been feared, as the "[oil](#)" continues to degrade and is hundreds of miles away from the loop current."

With the leak capped "the light sheen remaining on the Gulf's surface will continue to biodegrade and disperse but will not travel far," said Jane Lubchenco, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief.

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