

Total can end North Sea gas leak 'by end of month'

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French energy giant Total's Elgin rig, 150 miles (240 kms) off Aberdeen in the North Sea. French energy giant Total aims to plug the leak of potentially explosive gas from its stricken North Sea rig by the end of April, a senior executive has told a Scottish newspaper.

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The abandoned Elgin platform, 150 miles (240 kilometres) off Aberdeen on Scotland's east coast, has been spewing a cloud of gas since March 25.

Total is preparing to pump "heavy mud" into the leaking G4 well to cut off the gas in a "dynamic kill" operation, while simultaneously

proceeding with plans to drill two relief wells.

Officials have previously warned that it could take up to six months to drill a relief well and a back-up at the rig, whose 283 crew were hastily evacuated after the leak was discovered.

But Total's UK managing director Philippe Guys told the Aberdeen Press and Journal that if the dynamic kill operation is successful, the leak could be stopped before the start of May.

"If all goes as planned we envisage by the end of the month we should be having control of the well," he told the newspaper. But he added: "We won't rush to get these things done if we can't do it safely."

Total, which has described the leak as its worst problem in the North Sea in a decade, was only able to airlift experts to the rig for the first time last week due to fears the platform could explode.

A second helicopter flew to Elgin on Tuesday, the company said, adding that several more flights would drop off equipment for the plugging operation "over the coming weeks".

The company has hired specialists from Texas-based firm Wild Well Control, which was among those that worked to stem the massive oil spill in the [Gulf of Mexico](#) in 2010, to assist in the operation.

A sheen stretching several kilometres spread on the waters around the platform in the days following the accident, but Total insists the leak has not caused significant [environmental damage](#).

The Scottish government said on Wednesday that tests on fish caught near the rig found them to be untainted by hydrocarbons.

The last major accident in the [North Sea](#) was in 1988, when the Piper Alpha oil platform operated by the US-based Occidental Petroleum exploded, killing 167 people.

Total's British rival BP is still recovering from damage to its reputation and finances caused by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

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