

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
The BP Oil Spill: Human Exposure and Environmental Fate
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment
June 10, 2010

On April 20, 2010, the Transocean Drilling Rig Deepwater Horizon, operated by BP, exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, killing 11 rig workers and unleashing an oil spill that, by most estimates, has now surpassed even the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989. To date, millions of gallons of oil have flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, with no end in sight until as late as August.

It is too early to tell the full extent of the environmental and human health impact of this spill. Nothing quite like this spill has ever happened before; a spill of this magnitude under these circumstances is unprecedented. We can, however, anticipate some of the likely effects.

It is all too obvious that this spill will have serious environmental consequences. We've all seen the devastating pictures of coated shorelines and oiled wildlife. We are now hearing about possible plumes of oil under the surface of the ocean, threatening entire underwater ecosystems. What we don't know is the long-term environmental impact of oil as it settles into the ocean floor, into marsh ecosystems, and as its chemicals move into the ocean food chain.

The health impacts of the spill could also be extremely serious. Crude oil contains many substances known to be toxic to humans, including the chemicals commonly known as BTEX chemicals. These chemicals can cause short-term acute health effects, such as the headaches and nausea that are being reported along the Gulf coast; they have also been shown to cause cancer and other long-term neurologic and reproductive damage.

The consequences of this spill will continue for decades, so it is important that we start preparing for them now. I am pleased that we have here with us three experts who can help us understand the likely impacts of the spill: Dr. Gina Solomon from the Natural Resources Defense Council; Dr. Edward Trapido from Louisiana State University; and Dr. Chris Reddy from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. I look forward to your testimony, and I hope your work will help us prepare for the inevitable impacts of this catastrophe.