

## The Biggest Spill of 2010: The Gulf of Mexico oil spill

### Introduction

Oil spill is a form of environmental pollution which involves the release of petroleum products into the environment. Oil spill can either occur during drilling or while in transport to various places either through pipes or tankers. In most cases, oil spill occurs in the oceans causing a great havoc to the environment. Oil spills occurs as a result of human activities such as releases from ships, rigs, wells and the offshore platforms. However, oil spill can also occur in the seas through the natural process where the oil reaches the sea through seeping.

When oil spilling takes place, it may take a huge amount of time and money resources to clean up the mess. Through its effects on the environment, oil spill affects both the flora and fauna. The most affected are the seabirds which die in numbers following the menace. The size of the damage is determined by the place where an accident has occurred or the size of the accident. Accidents that take place in places where there are rich marine resources like fish and seabirds are likely to cause a huge damage than those in are that are not rich in resources.

One of the most disastrous marine oil spills in the petroleum industry in U.S. occurred at the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010. This oil spill caused the largest oil spill disaster to the environment than any other spills that has ever taken place in the history. The Gulf of Mexico is considered as the American treasure as it contains a variety of resources (Scholastic, 2010). One of the main treasures inhabited in the place are the turtles, seabirds and the fish which are all a very important part of the economy. The seabirds usually nests along the coast of this strip. According to Scholastic, 2010), many people living around the Gulf of Mexico depends on the resources on the place for their livelihood. This is through employment as well as business opportunities. The main activities are fishing and oil and gas drilling.

However, these activities faced a sudden turn on April 20, 2010. On this day, an oil rig which was located at the coast of Louisiana exploded leading to the spilling of the oil over a large are in the coast. This oil rig called Deepwater Horizon was located 66 kilometers off the coast of Louisiana. The rig was drilling oil one mile below the sea level. Unfortunately, a series of technical problems are said to have caused the explosion which led to the death of eleven people (Scholastic, 2010). After the explosion, the well was damaged which led to the eruption of huge quantities of both gases and oil. After eruption, a massive oil slick spread across the Gulf of Mexico. This incident completely changed the environment around the coast. Dead turtles were washed on the shores by strong waves. Seabirds were also not spared by the disaster. The oil spill on the coast affected the biological mechanisms leading to death of a large fraction. According to Scholastic (2010), the marine biologists have warned that the disaster may completely change the ecosystem of the Gulf of Mexico.

After the explosion, the well spilt mere than 250,000 barrel of oil into the ocean (Scholastic, 2010). However, it has been very difficult to accurately estimate the exact amount of oil spilt due to the depth of the gusher. Things were turned even worse by the fact that the spilled oil spread at a very wide area causing havoc to these areas. The disaster has also affected the wildlife through the oil toxin. The effects of this disaster will have both the long term and the short term effects on the whole country. The disaster has affected the country at different perspectives.

## **Long term and short term effects on the human**

According to the discussion by McCoy M. and Salerno J. (2010), the disaster has a very serious implications on the human health. The impacts of the disaster are going to affect the psychological, physical, social and economic health of the people living in the affected areas. The impact comes from the oil itself, dispersants used in the cleaning process, and weathered oil products. Human health has also been affected through the environmental conditions like heat (McCoy and Salerno, 2010). People are likely to experience complications of fatigue and stress related to the high level of heat. The most affected people in this case are the workers and the people who are engaged in the clean up activities.

The oil spill has disrupted the normal functioning of the respiratory system both in the short run as well as in the long run. People living in the affected areas have been reported to experience a common problem with the respiratory system. It is also expected that the cases of neurological complications will be evident in the long term due to the prolonged exposure to these conditions.

According to McCoy and Salerno, (2010), the human health will be negatively affected through physical stressors like the heat and fatigue and the chemical stressors from the dispersants and the oil itself. Furthermore, people are affected psychologically by the effects of the disaster. For instance, parents will suffer psychologically for the sickness of their children. Pregnant women as well as the unborn children are also going to be affected adversely by the oil spill. Prolonged exposure to these chemicals can affect the child during the gestation period, at conception and after birth. It is also observed that the child development is also affected.

McCoy and Salerno, (2010), continues to argue that the acute toxicity, endocrine toxicity, genotoxicity and injuries will also be caused by the spilt oil.

## **Long term and short term economic impacts of the oil spill on the U.S. markets**

Apart from the human health, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has also affected the economy of the country. According to report published by Baker (2010), the disaster has mainly affected the economic situations of the Gulf coast states. This report indicated that the impact of the oil spill will affect the economic situations of the municipalities which are likely to last some years to come.

Some of the main areas that have been affected are the fishing and the tourist industries. As observed earlier, the disaster has led to death of many sea birds and turtles. These are some of major tourist attraction part of the fauna and their deaths pose a threat to the tourist industry.

The coastal scenes are also part of the tourist attraction. After the oil spill, the beauty of the scene has been destroyed. The oil provides a slippery ground which poses the tourist to dangers.

According to Baker (2010), the Gulf fishing provides one fifth of the U.S. oyster production and three quarters of total shrimp production in the country. Unfortunately, the disaster has led to the closure of a wide area to both commercial and recreational fishing. This has consequently led to huge losses in terms of the revenue that was got from the sale of fish. Furthermore, many people who were employed on the fishing sector have also been affected. This reduces the employment level. It has also been observed that the hotel cancellation rates have reached as high as fifty percent. This implies that the money that is usually generated through tourism is likely to reduce by the same rate. This has impacted negatively on the economic well being of the whole country.

## **Rectification measures**

There are several measures that have been taken in an effort to combat the effects of the oil spill. However, the process of cleaning has been faced with a lot of challenges because of the funding of the exercise because of large sums of money required. One of the main methods that have been applied is the use of dispersants. These are chemicals that are used to dissolve the oil to reduce its effects on the ecosystem.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the disaster of the oil spill has caused a very serious problem to the economy and the entire population. Its effects have been felt both physically and psychologically. It is therefore very important for all the parties involved in the rehabilitation exercise to play their parts for quick recovery.

## **Works Cited**

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