

# EDITORIAL: Disaster not over; Gulf needs our support

Published: Friday, August 6, 2010 at 3:30 a.m.

Last Modified: Thursday, August 5, 2010 at 11:26 p.m.

Oil has stopped gushing from BP's failed well in the Gulf of Mexico, and a federal report claims most of the spilled oil has been dispersed or contained. As encouraging as that sounds, the impact of this disaster won't be over until residents of the Gulf Coast say it is over.

Until then, we should not let BP or the government declare victory and depart. The lives of people from the Florida Panhandle to Louisiana have been disrupted. They have suffered through tremendous loss. In many cases, jobs are gone and property values have plummeted. For them, the end is not yet in sight.

The runaway well has been plugged. On Thursday, after 106 days, BP used cement in a 'static kill' operation that took about five hours. That isn't the final step. Later this month, a relief well will be finished, allowing more cement and mud to be injected. That is supposed to seal the well for good. We certainly hope so.

It appears the Gulf is resilient. A team of federal scientists estimates that more than a quarter of the 206 million gallons of spilled oil is degrading naturally or through chemical dispersants. Perhaps another quarter of it has been sucked up, skimmed or burned off.

Even if those estimates — based on formulas, not hard evidence — turn out to be accurate, there is still a huge amount of oil in the water. It may not be easy to see, but that doesn't mean it isn't causing damage to the environment. Nor do we know the long-term impact of the chemical dispersants used to break up the oil. It is too soon to know the ecological damage.

There will be renewed pressure on President Barack Obama to lift the moratorium on deepwater drilling before its scheduled end on Nov. 30. We hope to see that happen. Not only do we need domestic sources of oil, but resuming drilling also is necessary for the economic recovery of the region. Many jobs are tied to the industry.

But there must be stronger safeguards. Equipment and oversight need to improve. The industry's own evaluation shows equipment used undersea has lower quality ratings than equipment used on land, even though the technical challenges of drilling in deep water are much higher.

The 'long-stem' process used by BP for the Deepwater Horizon well is known to be riskier than other methods. Sen. Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., told The Tuscaloosa News editorial board earlier this week that other oil companies such as Chevron won't use 'long-stem' drilling in deep water because of safety concerns.

The beaches on the Alabama Gulf Coast are clean. Commercial and recreational fishing soon will resume. But the region won't really get back on its feet until tourists return.

We need to support our neighbors to the south. If you have put off a vacation to Alabama's shore, this is a great time to escape the inland heat. Doing a good deed has never been more enjoyable.

Copyright © 2010 TuscaloosaNews.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.