

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 7, 2012

Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr.
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2100 2nd Street, SW
Washington, DC 20593-7000

Dear Admiral Papp,

Recently, the Coast Guard announced that it had approved a plan by BP and Transocean to reinspect the Deepwater Horizon wreckage and well head using subsea ROVs following the detection of an oil sheen by BP on November 2nd and confirmation of the sheen using satellite imagery.¹ This new ROV inspection by BP and Transocean follows the detection of an oil sheen around the Macondo well site in September that was determined to be coming from oil leaking from the containment dome, which remains on the sea floor. According to the Coast Guard, no additional oil leaks were observed from the containment dome following an ROV operation to cap the containment dome leaks in October.

The presence of this new sheen raises significant questions about whether there might be a continuing danger to the environment posed by oil trapped in the Deepwater Horizon wreckage and the Macondo well. It also highlights the importance of ensuring that BP is properly addressing the long-term impacts of the 2010 oil spill. BP has failed to adequately respond to questions concerning these issues that we had posed to the company in correspondence from October 16, 2012. BP has also failed to provide any documents and non-public information that we requested in our letter. It is imperative that BP take all available actions to mitigate further environmental damage from its oil spill.

As BP has not provided sufficient information in response to our previous request, we therefore ask that you respond to the following questions in writing by the close of business on December 21, 2012:

1. As part of the ROV inspection that will now begin on December 9th, do BP and Transocean plan to conduct a subsea examination of the wellhead, all the riser drill pipe, and all of the wreckage of the Deepwater Horizon so that the exact sources of any leaking residual oil can be identified, contained and captured? Is there any debris or wreckage that BP does not plan to survey, and if so please identify and describe it, and indicate why it will not be surveyed?

¹ Available at: <http://www.restorethegulf.gov/release/2012/11/23/coast-guard-approves-plan-rov-reinspection>

2. The initial Coast Guard announcement on November 29th stated that the ROV inspection by BP and Transocean would begin on December 3, 2012. However, the same November 29th press release that now appears on restorethegulf.gov, which the website states “is the official federal portal for the Deepwater BP oil spill response and recovery” now lists December 9th as the date the inspection will commence.² Why was the start of the ROV inspection by BP and Transocean delayed by nearly one week? Did the Coast Guard approve the delay of the ROV inspection? Why was the November 29th press release changed on restorethegulf.gov but no subsequent announcement made that the ROV inspection would be delayed?
3. As part of this ROV inspection, do BP and Transocean plan to examine the sea floor surrounding the Macondo well, to ensure that oil is not migrating and escaping from locations on the sea floor away from the wellhead, and if so, how large of an area will be examined? If not, why not?
4. According to the Coast Guard announcement from November 29th, the Federal On-Scene Coordinator has “tasked BP and Transocean with developing a comprehensive array of options for permanent remediation of oil that could still be contained within wreckage in the vicinity of the original Deepwater Horizon incident.” Does the Coast Guard believe it is possible for BP and Transocean to capture or remove the rest of the oil trapped in the riser, containment dome and other pieces of the Deepwater Horizon wreckage to prevent further degradation of the environment?
5. How much oil or other drilling fluids could be expected to be trapped in the riser pipe, the containment dome, or other wreckage of the Deepwater Horizon? Have there been other documented instances of oil leaking from the wreckage beyond that from the containment dome discovered in October?
6. Does BP possess a detailed diagram or map of the debris in the wreckage field? If so, has BP shared that information with the Federal On-Scene Coordinator? Please provide all diagrams, maps, or ROV or other visual footage of the wreckage and/or debris and those areas affected by this recent oil sheen.

I thank you for your attention to this matter. Please contact Morgan Gray on the Natural Resources Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-6065 or Tiffany Benjamin on the Energy and Commerce Committee Democratic staff at (202) 226-3641 if you have any questions regarding this request.



Rep. Edward J. Markey
Ranking Democratic Member
Natural Resources Committee

Sincerely,



Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Democratic Member
Energy and Commerce Committee

² Id.