



Tony Hayward, the chief executive of BP, claimed recently that his company's testing has shown "no evidence" that any of the oil in the Gulf of Mexico is lurking beneath the ocean surface.

Oil is lighter than water, Mr. Hayward explained, and will rise to the top.

Apparently, Mr. Hayward is not familiar with the results of a test conducted in Norway, in which his company took part, that suggested exactly the opposite would happen when oil was released in very deep water. A demand has come from Congress that Mr. Hayward explain himself.

In the meantime, university researchers keep adding to the preliminary body of evidence suggesting that some of the oil — no one knows what proportion — is dissolving into the water and forming huge plumes of dispersed oil droplets beneath the surface. This is worrisome because it raises the possibility that sea life, including commercially important species of fish, could be exposed to a greater load of toxins than conventional models of oil spills would suggest.

At least three groups of researchers have reported evidence for these undersea plumes of oil droplets. And the government, with little fanfare, posted a map this week showing the location of one plume, based on sampling done by a research ship operating under contract to BP. This would seem to be the most detailed confirmation yet by a federal agency that the undersea plumes are real.

The first group to report the subsea plumes was led by Samantha Joye of the University of Georgia and Vernon Asper of the University of Southern Mississippi, who found several apparent plumes at various ocean depths, generally stretching west or southwest from the gushing oil well.

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