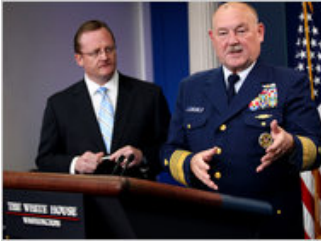


Dispersal of Oil Means Cleanup to Take Years, Official Says

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Although the Coast Guard had trained for the possibility of cleaning up a disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, it had never anticipated that oil would spread across such a broad area and break up into hundreds of thousands of patches as the current spill has done, the commander heading the federal response to the spill said Monday.

“It’s the breadth and complexity of the disaggregation of the oil” that is now posing the greatest clean-up challenge, the commander, Adm. Thad W. Allen, said at a news conference at the White House.

He underscored the challenge by acknowledging, in response to a reporter’s question, that it would take years to mitigate the impact of the spill on the marshes, beaches and wildlife on the Gulf Coast. On Sunday, the admiral had said it could take well into autumn to deal with the slick that is spreading relentlessly across four states of the gulf.

“This is a long campaign, and we’re going to be dealing with this for the foreseeable future,” he said. The assessment was among Admiral Allen’s gloomier reports on the spill that began 47 days ago. But he also reported some signs of progress.

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