



A survey of the seafloor near BP's blown-out well in the Gulf of Mexico has turned up dead and dying coral reefs that were probably damaged by the oil spill, scientists said Friday. The coral sites lie seven miles southwest of the well, at a depth of about 4,500 feet, in an area where large plumes of dispersed oil were discovered drifting through the deep ocean last spring in the weeks after the spill.

The large areas of darkened coral and other damaged marine organisms were almost certainly dying from exposure to toxic substances, scientists said.

The corals were discovered on Tuesday by scientists aboard a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration research vessel using a submersible robot equipped with cameras and sampling tools.

The documented presence of oil plumes in the area, the proximity to BP's well and the recent nature of the die-off make it highly likely that the spill was responsible, said Charles Fisher, a marine biologist from Pennsylvania State University who is the chief scientist on the gulf expedition, which was financed by the federal government.

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