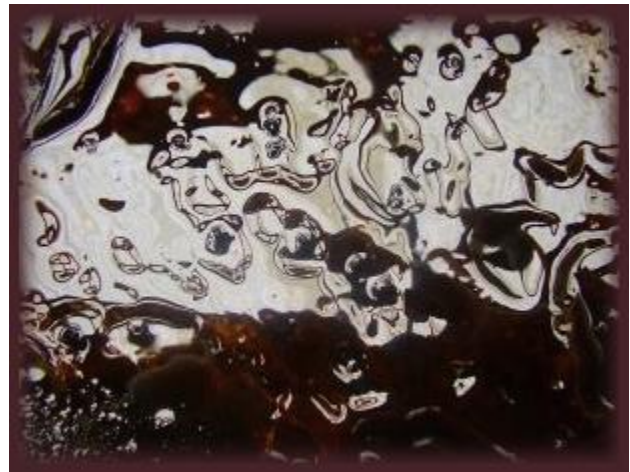




# 10 Biggest Health Dangers of the Gulf Oil Spill

**June 16th, 2010**

The BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which began after an explosion crippled the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, is now the biggest oil disaster in U.S. history. Cleaning the mess will take months, and the longer-term effects on health and wildlife will take years to heal.



## **Right Now**

1. **Sickness among clean-up workers:** The combination of oil fumes and heat from the Gulf has led to several workers being hospitalized from fumes, and the curious chemical makeup of some of the substances used to clean up the oil can often lead to skin irritation or, at high levels, cancer.
2. **Danger to marine life:** The underwater nature of the spill means it's that much closer to undersea life, and therefore able to do more damage in a shorter amount of time.
3. **Aggravation of existing illnesses:** People already suffering from asthma or similar lung diseases could see their conditions worsened because of exposure to oil and chemicals.
4. **Pregnancy risks:** The oil contains many volatile and toxic chemicals, some of which have been linked to premature birth, low birth weight, and miscarriages, making the Gulf Coast region a dangerous one for pregnant women.
5. **Smoke fallout:** Planned burns of spilled oil on the ocean's surface have a way of backfiring. Often, particles held in the smoke drift down to earth and wind up in people's eyes and lungs, which can aggravate existing medical conditions for some.



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## In the Future

6. **Neurological disorders:** Some of the fishermen who cleaned up the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 wound up suffering neurological problems as a result of prolonged exposure to a toxic cocktail of chemicals.
7. **Food contamination:** There's still no telling how badly the food chain will be damaged by the oil spill. One scientist at the National Resources Defense Council said there will be a "legacy of contamination."
8. **Oxygen depletion:** Hypoxia occurs when dissolved oxygen in the water is reduced so much that the imbalance begins to harm aquatic life forms. The process is exacerbated by the microbes in the chemicals used to clean up the leaking oil.
9. **Dispersion of oil:** Many experts are predicting that the oil will continue to flow into the Gulf well into August, which increases the likelihood that it might be picked up by the Gulf Stream currents and carried out to the Atlantic Ocean. That would, in turn, affect animals dwelling there, including dolphins.
10. **Lung disease:** One of the dispersants being used to clean the spill, Corexit, is one of the most toxic available, which could lead to potential lung problems for cleaners and workers who inhale the fumes and particles without wearing proper breathing equipment.



A version of this paper has been published in Nursing Schools, [www.nursingschools.net](http://www.nursingschools.net)