

Deepwater Horizon: Identifying Harmful Elements of Persisting Oil

Deepwater Horizon drilled a hole through the ocean's floor into the Macondo oil field in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil was piped from under the sea up to the surface through 1500 meters of water. On 20 April 2010, just two months after drilling began, the floating oil rig exploded and the 9 year-old structure collapsed. The oil well was sealed 152 days later on 19 September 2010. Scientists estimate that about 535 000 metric tons leaked into the environment.

Despite clean-up efforts, many beaches are still contaminated with oil remnants. Scientists at EPFL (Switzerland) and the WHOI (United States) determined that about half of the oil leading to these remnants has dissipated into the environment. The other half accumulates into persistent oily residues. An oiled sand patty collected 19 months after the oil-spill consists of different types of potentially toxic hydrocarbons.

