

## Gulf oil leak estimates dramatically rise again

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The official estimate of the flow rate from the leaking gulf oil well has surged again, with government officials announcing Tuesday that 35,000 barrels (1.47 million gallons) to 60,000 barrels (2.52 million gallons) of oil a day are now gushing from the reservoir deep beneath the gulf.

Just last week, government-appointed scientists on the Flow Rate Technical Group estimated the leak at roughly 20,000 to 40,000 barrels a day (840,000 to 1.68 million gallons), but that came with a caveat: They were using older data, including video taken of the damaged riser pipe when it still had multiple leaks.

After the pipe was cut on June 3, and a containment cap placed on it, the flow became easier to estimate. In the past 24 hours scientists have taken direct measurements of pressures inside the so-called top hat that is collecting oil and gas.

"A single flow is easier to estimate: Prior to the riser cut, oil was flowing both from the end of the riser and from several different holes in the riser kink. This made estimates -- particularly based on two dimensional video alone -- more difficult," the Department of Interior said in a news release.

Currently BP has the capacity to capture only 18,000 barrels of oil a day coming from the well. A second method of tapping the well, one that will add up to 10,000 barrels of capacity, will take oil and gas through the "choke" line on the blowout preventer that was used in the "top kill" operation last month. Instead of drilling mud going down the line, oil and gas will be brought up the line to a ship at the surface, where BP plans to burn the oil and gas in two separate flares.

But as it has become apparent that the well is spewing far more oil than originally estimated, the Obama administration has pressed BP to add additional capacity to capture it. BP responded this weekend with a new plan that will put enough vessels on site by the end of June to handle 53,000 barrels a day, and the company said it will ramp that up to 80,000 barrels by the middle of July.

"As we continue to collect additional data and refine these estimates, it is important to realize that the numbers can change. In particular, the upper number is less certain -- which is exactly why we have been planning for the worst case scenario from the beginning and why we are continuing to focus on responding to the upper end of the estimate, plus additional contingencies," Secretary of Energy Steven Chu said in a written statement.

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