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Weather Hampers Efforts to Burn Some of Oil Spill

By SAM DOLNICK

ROBERT, La. — While a **controlled burn** of petroleum in the Gulf of Mexico was judged successful last week, strong winds and rain have hampered efforts to conduct additional ones to contain the spill.

Petty Officer Matthew Schofield of the Coast Guard said Monday that a controlled burn of the **oil slick** took place from 5 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday and burned a few thousand gallons of oil.

But the rain and wind will have to ease before they can try another, Petty Officer Schofield said. “Right now, the weather is a big factor in how you can and can’t do it,” he said. “If the powers that be decide that’s something we’re going to do, we’ll move forward.”

With a clear-weather forecast for the rest of the week, **BP’s** chief operating officer, Doug Suttles, said Monday that officials hoped to conduct more burns in the coming days. BP was leasing the oil rig that exploded April 20.

Crews had been hoping that controlled burns would help ease the impact of the oil reaching the fragile Louisiana coast. The process, called an in-situ burn, consists of corralling concentrated parts of the spill in a 500-foot-long fireproof boom, moving it to another location and burning it. It has been tested effectively on other spills, but weather and concerns about marine ecosystems can complicate the procedure.

A burn does not get rid of the oil entirely. It leaves waxy residue that can either be skimmed from the surface or sink to the bottom of the ocean.

Rear Adm. Mary E. Landry, the federal on-scene coordinator for the gulf effort, said last week that in the past burns had been “effective in burning 50 to 95 percent of oil collected in a fire boom.”

The downside, Admiral Landry said, is a “black plume” of smoke that puts soot and other particulates into the air.

Birds and mammals are believed to be more capable of handling the risk of a local fire and a temporary plume than of handling the risk posed by a spreading oil slick.