

June 16, 2010      MSNBC Countdown With Keith Olbermann

**Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Information**

**KEITH OLBERMANN, HOST (voice-over): Which of these stories will you be talking about tomorrow?**

**“...And still, on day 58, the disaster is flowing nearly as uncontrollably as the oil. More threats from BP to its cleanup crews: wear respirators or protective gear and you are fired...”**

“...OLBERMANN: It is the kind of work no one should want to try unless fully prepared. Federal law requires that emergency response cleanup workers who will handle hazardous materials be trained a minimum of 24 hours, as well as demonstrate competency.

**Yet in our number one story: in the midst of a burgeoning health crisis along the Gulf of Mexico, an alarming report tonight that Gulf cleanup workers need receive only four hours of training, and it’s all perfectly legal under the Department of Labor guidelines...”**

BP today attempting damage control, announcing it has handing out millions in search grants to study the impact on the environment and public health of all of this, up to \$500 million. Nalco, the company that makes the chemical dispersant being used by BP, attempting pure B.S., claiming on its Web site, its product is, quote, “safer than dish soap,” without actually listing any of the ingredients in the dispersant.

**Let’s turn now to Monique Harden, co-director of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, a New Orleans-based advocacy group with expertise in environmental health law and policy.**

Thank you for your time tonight, Ms. Harden.

MONIQUE HARDEN, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE: Thank you, Keith.

OLBERMANN: Training: four hours. Could that possibly be enough time?

HARDEN: Absolutely not. What's happened in this situation is that BP, with the approval of our government, has placed expediency over health protection. The most critical part of safety training is learning how to protect your health and your body from toxic exposure.

The oil that BP has—you know, that is spewing from the Gulf of Mexico is toxic. It's a hazardous waste, without question. You can't dispose of it as you would ordinary trash. Any facility that would receive any of the oil collected from the Gulf would need to have certification and meet pretty rigorous requirements, because it is treated like a hazardous waste.

In this case, we've got folks who don't have adequate training and because they don't have adequate training, it really jeopardizes their health.

OLBERMANN: What are you hearing about whether or not workers are even wearing their protective gear? Are they being encouraged to wear it by BP or not?

HARDEN: No, they're not being encouraged at all.

I serve on a small community foundation that has been giving emergency grants for—that enable local groups to purchase respirators and protective gear that are provided at no charge to people in the Gulf who are involved in the clean up. What we have been told by the folks who are involved in the cleanup work is that when they have come to the job site wearing their respirators and protective gear that they've been provided, they were told by BP representatives that they would—that they would be terminated from employment if they wore them and had to, you know, get rid of them.

OLBERMANN: This leads to something the “Associated Press” reported, that many of these workers with their four hours of training, who are not allowed to wear their own protective gear, never mind not being provided any by BP, would be the men who were out fishing this time of year, and women I assume, too, had those fishing grounds not be closed.

Do we know how many of these cleanup workers, a percentage, perhaps—how many of them have to do this out of the economic necessity caused by this BP disaster in the Gulf?

HARDEN: The overwhelming majority of cleanup workers are the fishermen, shrimpers, who have been put out of work by BP's oil disaster. And in fact, BP representatives have spoken very glowingly

at community meetings that it's their goal to employ as many of these out-of-work fishermen and shrimpers as they can in order to minimize payouts for a loss of compensation.

OLBERMANN: Who's actually governmentally responsible for ensuring the safety and health of the people trying to do the cleanup here? I'm—there's a report I read that in that four-state region, OSHA has 25 employees. Does it seem unavoidable that people are going to fall through the cracks?

HARDEN: Well, I think the situation with OSHA and the few resources and staffing that they have for the Gulf region, it's part of this larger pattern, where we see this major failure of our regulatory agencies to protect our health and safety—in fact, giving over that protection to companies like BP, corporate polluters around the country. And so OSHA, like the Minerals Management Services, is an agency that is kowtowed because of the lack of resources and staff to doing an adequate job.

OLBERMANN: Is there anything to be done about this?

HARDEN: Well, I think the more people raising hell about this, to ensure that people have respirators—I mean, think about it, all the images that we've seen of folks just wearing hard hats and gloves should be unacceptable to everybody in this country and around the world. And we should be ensuring that respirators and protective gear are provided immediately. And BP needs to face liability for endangering the health of people as it has done by preventing them from having respirators.

**BP should not be running the Gulf region like a prison ward. We've got to stop that.**

OLBERMANN: Monique Harden of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights in New Orleans—great thanks.

HARDEN: Thank you.

OLBERMANN: That's COUNTDOWN for this, the 58<sup>th</sup> day of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf. I'm Keith Olbermann, good night and good luck.

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