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EPA demands less toxic dispersant

By Juliet Eilperin

The Environmental Protection Agency informed BP officials late Wednesday that the company has 24 hours to choose a less toxic form of **chemical dispersants** to break up its oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, according to government sources familiar with the decision, and must apply the new form of dispersants within 72 hours of submitting the list of alternatives.

The move is significant, because it suggests federal officials are now concerned that the unprecedented use of chemical dispersants could pose a significant threat to the Gulf of Mexico's marine life. BP has been using two forms of dispersants, Corexit 9500A and Corexit 9527A, and so far has applied 600,000 gallons on the surface and 55,000 underwater.

"Dispersants have never been used in this volume before," said an administration official spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision hasn't been formally announced. "This is a large amount of dispersants being used, larger amounts than have ever been used, on a pipe that continues to leak oil and that BP is still trying to cap."

The new policy applies to both surface and undersea application, according to sources, and comes as EPA has just posted **BP's own results** from monitoring the effect underwater application of chemical dispersants has had in terms of toxicity, dissolved oxygen and effectiveness.

An **EPA** official said the agency would make an announcement on the matter later today.

After BP conducted three rounds of testing, federal officials approved the use of underwater dispersants late last week, but environmentalists and some lawmakers have questioned the potential dangers of such a strategy.

On Monday, Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) sent a **letter** to EPA administrator Lisa P. Jackson questioning the approach, given that Britain banned some formulations of the dispersant the government is now using, Corexit, more than a decade ago.

In the letter, Markey warned, "The release of hundreds of thousands of gallons of chemicals into the Gulf of Mexico could be an unprecedented, large and aggressive experiment on our oceans, and requires careful oversight by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other appropriate federal agencies."

EPA has a list of its **approved dispersants** on its Web site.

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