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## BP Fires 10,000 Cleanup Workers

*"Last week they shut the whole [operation] down."*

By [Mac McClelland](#) | Fri Aug. 6, 2010 10:18 AM PDT

New BP CEO Bob Dudley wasn't kidding when he [announced last week](#) [1] that it was time for the company to scale back oil-spill cleanup operations. In fact, by the time he'd said that, the responder force had been drawn down by about 25 percent.

On July 13, the Deepwater Horizon Joint Command was reporting 46,000 responders. On July 23, it was down to 30,000, and the numbers have hovered around the low 30s since. Included in this tally are some Coast Guard and National Guard staff, but BP and subcontractors comprise the vast majority. (I've been trying to get the exact breakdown from the Coast Guard for four days, but to no avail, and BP said it didn't have it on hand, though the Coast Guard has told me it [just reports BP's numbers](#) [2].) In Grand Isle, Louisiana, cleanup workers (none of whom can be named; you [know this drill](#) [3] by now) say their coworkers were either told to go home for Tropical Storm Bonnie and then never called back or fired in a massive and sudden drug test.

"Friday, the day before Bonnie, they sent a bunch of people home until further notice, and a lot of people didn't get the further notice," one supervisor told me. **"Then last week, they shut the whole [cleanup operation] down. It was 'Piss in a cup or throw your ID in the bucket.' This was a BP drug test, not a [subcontracting] company drug test. It's the first time BP tested us."**

A BP spokesman told me that all its subcontractors are required to drug test their cleanup employees and allow BP to do random checks itself; it just happened to do one of those checks last week. But the cleanup workers believe the company's motivation was to fire a bunch of people fast. Maybe it's because they're conspiracy theorists. Or maybe it's because the subcontractors had long had openly lax substance-abuse standards. "Most of those people had never been drug tested before," the supervisor told me. "I worked for two different subcontractors that didn't test me." He also pointed out that the local bar's parking lot is nightly full of company cars and drunk guys who drive them; one cleanup worker I met

had a picture in his phone of beer cans in the cupholders of cleanup vehicles in broad daylight. "They wanted to get rid of people, and drug testing was a good way to do it. I used to supervise 30 guys; now I've got 10."

The scaleback is set to continue. Supervisors say they're supposed to break down to just a "skeleton crew" by the end of September, so hopefully the [media myth](#) [4] that there's no more oil anywhere comes true. "Everything still changes day to day," the supervisor told me. "You don't know when a bunch of oil's gonna pop up."

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