

SPILL FUELS ACTION

Website showcases tragic impact of BP oil spill in Gulf of Mexico

The summer of 2010 will probably be remembered as the “summer of the spill.” Or maybe 2010 will be remembered as the “year of the spill.” Let’s hope it doesn’t become the “decade of the spill.”

As bad news continues to flow from the Gulf of Mexico almost as fast as the oil from the blown BP well, it’s hard for those of us who haven’t been there to grasp the enormity of the disaster. A website created by Andy Lintner, www.ifitwasmyhome.com, attempts to bring the spill into your own backyard.

The main feature of the site is a Google map with a shaded outline depicting the range of the spill. The size and shape of the spill are updated regularly to reflect its daily growth. The site uses data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to plot the range of the spill’s impact. You can type your hometown into a box, and with the click of a button, the spill is superimposed over your location.

When I typed in Scranton, the spill covered the entire top third of Pennsylvania, extending into Lake Erie on its western edge, above Syracuse, N.Y. to the north, and almost halfway across Massachusetts to the east. I entered Washington, D.C., and the spill stretched across parts of seven states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey.

There is also a link on the site to the live, underwater video feed of the spill provided by BP that shows the now familiar orange cloud billowing from the broken pipe. There’s a meter on the site that tracks the estimated number of gallons spewing into the sea. Watching the numbers rolling endlessly upward on the meter is quite sobering. The meter is courtesy of PBS “NewsHour,” which gives an explanation of how the estimate is calculated on its website.

There are links to stories covering different aspects of the spill, such as the politics, technology and human costs. There’s a brief description of the spill with links to other serious incidents involving BP.

There’s also a “Frequently Asked Questions” section. The last question, “Is the oil really hurting anything?” has a link that takes you to some truly disturbing images of sea birds struggling in the viscous goop.

In the “What Can You Do?” section there are several options listed with links for people who want to do something to help:

- **Contact your congressional representatives to share your thoughts**
- **Submit your ideas for technology solutions for the spill and cleanup**
- **Volunteer to help in cleanup efforts on land or sea**
- **Donate to organizations that are working on different aspects of the disaster**

The site falls somewhere between a professional and an amateur effort as far as the look and content go. The writing doesn’t meet journalistic standards for objectivity because it’s infused with emotion and outrage. The information, however, appears to be well sourced and accurate. The navigation is simple and functions well. The layout and typography are straightforward but won’t win any design awards. There are even a few ads on the site.

Overall, I think the site accomplishes its mission. The combination of the map, the video of the continuously gushing oil and the rapidly advancing numbers on the meter drive home the seriousness of the spill. In fact, spill no longer feels like an adequate word to describe what’s happening. Eruption seems more appropriate.

KEVIN O’NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.



KEVIN O’NEILL
InSites

How to help

There are numerous government agencies and nongovernment organizations working to respond to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico:

■ **Deepwater Horizon Response:** www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/page/2931/46359/

■ **To contact your U.S. representative:** writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml

■ **U.S. Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.:** casey.senate.gov/contact/

■ **U.S. Senator Arlen Specter:** <http://specter.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Contact.ContactForm>