

PENSACOLA News Journal

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Never forget the tragic lessons of BP's oil spill

Last week, on the 20th, we marked just four short years ago the Deepwater Horizon oil spill exploded into our beloved and sacred waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

To many, the severity of that forgone crisis seems presently abstracted, memorialized in haziness, a morbid tragedy.

Because presently, our beaches boom in color – white sands, emerald waters, tan flesh, beach ball and bathing suit hues – vibrancy defines our Gulf shorelines.

But never forget: The past is never dead.

That is the immutable lesson moaned from Texas to Alaska by the ghosts of oil spills past. And that is the haunting echo that is ever surfacing from the dark, unexamined depths of the spill-stained Gulf.

Dolphins still die and lie on Mississippi shores. Fishermen's catches are brought in bearing strange lesions. Men and women from oil spill cleanup crews still claim dermatological and respiratory suffering.

Barefooted beach-goers still find tarballs and tar mats on the shores and shallows of Pensacola Beach. Scientists are showing, under the unflinching gaze of microscopes, that BP's oil slows, sickens and kills some of the Gulf's smallest and most fragile species, racking the Gulf Coast down to the depths of its food chain.

Yet, even the ongoing delivery of such dire news seems muted – no longer screaming forth from front-page headlines, but instead, tucked inside news folds to more subtle, regional and wire news sections.

Nonetheless, the past is never dead. It is not prophecy to say that we will continue to hear BP's qualifications of the damage as it surfaces. From the first day of the Deepwater Horizon tragedy, public-relations statements delivering updates and analysis have arrived faster than the painstaking scientific work that inherently lags behind human proclamation. But from the start of the spill, it is only science (the observation, the measurement, the process) that has been truthful with us.

So here at the four-year mark, we urge our readers to fight against letting the spill fade from memory.

As we ritualistically slip into another summer, take in the Gulf's beauty, its warmth, its sublime vastness. But even as the shimmering surface seems so far from the dreadful summer of 2010, always remember the crime that was done and that a very real poison still taints these waters. Always remember, the past is never dead.