

**Opening Statement of Chairman Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.)
Energy and Environment Subcommittee
August 19, 2010**

For anyone who has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, one of the best words you can hear is “remission.” Whether it’s cancer, HIV, or some other illness, a battery of modern cures can reduce the disease to lower, perhaps even undetectable levels.

Yet even in remission, there is often unease that the disease could return, and the pestering, inevitable scientific and metaphysical questions arise: “Where did it go?” “Could it come back?”

Right now, we are in a similar state in this environmental disaster. After many trials, and several false starts, BP finally created a system to cap and seal the well. Oil has not come from the Macondo well for about a month.

We are no longer at the bleeding stage. A tourniquet has been applied to the well. And now we are told we may need to wait for the final procedure – the relief well – until September.

And so, just like a patient in remission, we have reached a more stable stage of health with this spill. To say the well is capped is tantamount to a cure would be false confidence. Like unseen internal bleeding in a trauma patient, the veiled oil persisting in the Gulf poses continued risks.

Today, we are here to ask the same questions about this spill as a patient or a doctor would of a disease: “Where did it go?” and “Could it come back?”

According to the most recent estimates, 4.9 million barrels of oil spewed from BP’s well over the course of this 100 day gusher. Of that oil, some was captured. Some was dispersed. And some evaporated or naturally dispersed.

Yet at least 1.3 million barrels still remain unaccounted for in the waters and marshes of the Gulf, an amount 5 times larger than was spilled during the entire Exxon Valdez disaster.

Just as we are worried about rogue weapons sold on the black market harming the public, we must be vigilant about rogue oil from this disaster harming the public, putting a black mark on Gulf seafood or Gulf tourism.

In addition to all the oil, millions of gallons of dispersant chemicals have been used in unprecedented ways. Just a few weeks ago, FDA told me that they had determined that dispersants have a low potential to accumulate in seafood and do not pose a significant public health risk through human consumption. While this news is welcome, it addresses only the issue of short-term toxicity. The FDA knows little about the long term impacts that these compounds will have on marine life, nor do they know how the presence of oil and dispersants may influence the concentration of other toxic compounds in seafood species.

We have yet to see the full picture of hazards posed by this spill. The work done by FDA, NOAA and EPA will be critical in ensuring that fish and shellfish from the Gulf is safe to eat for years to come.

And so we will ask today: where do we go from here?

Where should monitoring and cleanup efforts be focused in this new chapter of recovery and restoration?

Are the clouds of oil suspended below the ocean's surface still a concern? What about the plumes of methane gas? Where have these plumes gone and will microbes consuming methane use up oxygen in the water, potentially asphyxiating areas of the Gulf?

What impact will all the oil, methane and the chemical dispersants have on marine life in the Gulf and on Gulf seafood supply in the years ahead?

Is seafood from the Gulf safe to eat today? Will it be safe to eat in the future?

American families want the only oil in their seafood to be cooking oil.

Ending BP's gusher in the Gulf does not, by itself, cure the harm that has been done. The treatment of the region from this disaster has only just begun.

To have a successful, continued response to this spill, we need to do three things going forward:

One: monitor the health of the waters, wetlands, wildlife, and people of the Gulf.

Two: maintain the pressure on BP and others to continue the recovery and restoration process.

And three: muster the attention of our entire country on solving the economic and environmental challenges from our continued dependence on oil, especially foreign oil.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.