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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Combating the BP Oil Spill”
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment
May 27, 2010

It is now five weeks since the Deepwater Horizon disaster and each day brings more discouraging news of the devastation this oil spill is causing to the economy, to the environment, and to the people of the Gulf coast region.

Each day, we are learning more about the cascade of mistakes and misjudgments that caused this catastrophe.

On Tuesday, May 25, 2010, Committee staff received a briefing from BP officials, including the Group Vice President for Safety and Operations and the leader of BP’s internal investigation. BP shared with the Committee a 48-page document summarizing the company’s interim incident investigation. I ask that this document be made part of the hearing records.

We learned a great deal from that presentation about BP’s preliminary observations of possible causes of the blowout and explosion at the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. We summarized this in a memorandum that Chairman Stupak and I released on Tuesday.

What we are now learning is that BP’s investigation appears to omit key issues. There have been several reports today concerning questionable well design choices made by BP, including the decisions to use a type of casing that could allow gas to flow up the annular space to the wellhead, to limit the number of spacers centering the casing despite objections by Halliburton, and to curtail the length of time that drilling fluids were circulated to clean gas out of the well. Yet none of these were mentioned by BP when they briefed our staff.

This raises the possibility that BP’s internal investigation is not examining the consequences of BP’s own decisions and conduct.

Our investigation is examining all potential causes of the blowout, including the responsibility of BP. That is why we are sending a letter to BP today seeking more information on these issues.

I want to thank Chairmen Markey and Stupak for their leadership in this investigation. The Committee's first hearing was held by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation on May 12, where Chairman Stupak revealed new information about problems with the blowout preventer. Chairman Markey has led the way in Congress in investigating the amount of oil coming from the well and providing video feeds of the leak.

Our next hearing will be a field hearing by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in Chalmette, Louisiana, on Monday, June 7, 2010, at 10:00 a.m., where we will explore some of the impacts of the oil spill.

We will continue a broad and aggressive investigation throughout the month of June.