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Bcc:

Date: Sat, 29 May 2010 01:03:53 PM

Subject: Pending developments

Attachments:

Dear Plume Team:

First, wanted to say that it is terrific that the team is moving forward with providing an upper bound with the new data. I cannot tell you what a nightmare the past two days have been dealing with the communications people at the White House, DOI, and the NIC who seem incapable of understanding the concept of a lower bound. The press release that went out on our results was misleading and was not reviewed by a scientist for accuracy. It was based on a brief report that Bill, Vic, and I had prepared, and the communications people "thought" that it reflected our results, but it didn't because they don't understand what a lower bound is. Bottom line: if you are at a university, do convince some of your best and brightest to go into science communication. Please. Let me give you a flavor of some of the "suggestions" I was getting from the NIC and from the communications people at the White House and DOI as recently as yesterday afternoon as to how to "simplify" our bottom line:

From a NIC Admiral: How about just saying that the range of flow rates is 12,000 to 25,000 barrels per day?
(No, because the 25,000 is a LOWER bound, not an UPPER bound....)

From a White House communications person: How about saying that several lines of evidence suggest that the flow is 12,000 to 19,000 barrels per day but that the rate could be as high as 25,000 barrels per day?
(No, because the 25,000 is a LOWER bound, not an UPPER bound....)

The message I delivered, with 100 representatives from the media present, was that 3 lines of evidence raised the minimum rate of release to 12,000 barrels per day. Two lines of evidence raised the limit to as high as 19,000 barrels per day. One method determined the rate to be 25,000 barrels per day OR HIGHER. We were still working to improve these estimates and get the upper bound from the flow rate team. This was the least amount of interpretation I could possibly put on the results.

Very few representatives from the media really took the time to understand this. CNN was the best. I want to thank those of you who also took the time to educate the media on the complexity of this situation, and especially to those who did so in a fair and balanced way without trying to cast doubt on the scientific integrity of other groups. We are all after the truth here.

In other news, I worked with a wonderfully resourceful Lieutenant here from the Coast Guard, Joe Kusak, and together we have managed to mobilize the Woods Hole experiment to directly image the plume with 1.8MHz imaging sonar and 1200 kHz ADCP. They are at the airport now awaiting a lift on a Coast Guard chopper to the Neptune Skandi where they will be integrated into an ROV to image the plume. We are also trying to get Ti sampling bottles on the ROV. This requires getting the UNOLS safety standards, which the bottles meet, crosswalked to ABS standards, which the workboat ROVs require. As I was chair of UNOLS when the safety standards were written, I recall that there were words in there that the UNOLS standards exceed the ABS standards. Just in case, I have Steve Etchemendy from MBARI standing by to intercede. He was an Alvin pilot, so knows the origin of the safety requirements for the Ti bottles, but also worked for Oceaneering, the workboat operators who need to sign off on the gas sampling.

My view is that the flux from the plume will be captured in a few days' time with an LMRP cap. It will be good to have the WHOI equipment calibrated to that flux so that if there ever is another blowout in the OCS, we will have calibrated methods for measuring the release from day 1.

Sorry this email got so long. Have to send from my MBARI account as my USGS computer is in service so I am on a loaner and only have bb access to my USGS mail. But thanks again for your service to the FRTG and I look forward to more results.

Marcia

