After Earth Day: BP oil, still

Wednesday, April 22, was Earth Day, a decades-old celebration of Reduce-Reuse-Recycle marked by festivals devoted to composting and solar panels. It’s a perennial reminder of the small sacrifices we can make to reduce our personal impact on the environment. But on the day after and for years to come, we continue to be faced with threats of environmental catastrophes, some of which are as much a consequence of decisions made by the people we elect as they are of our own actions.

BP oil, still

Five years ago, each day brought a gloomier revelation about the effects of BP’s Deepwater Horizon blowout on April 20, 2010: oiled wetlands, toxic dispersants, massive oil plumes beneath the water’s surface.

When the well was capped that July, the media coverage died down. But now environmentalists say that long-term effects are starting to show.
“BP’s oil is still in the gulf and it’s still impacting wildlife and people,” said Raleigh Hoke, communications director for the Gulf Restoration Network.

He said dead dolphins have been washing ashore since 2010. Scientists have also found a large number of bluefin tuna with heart conditions they attribute to BP oil. In June of last year, a 1,250-pound tar mat composed of BP oil was discovered on a beach at Fort Pickens, Florida near Pensacola. Researchers also found an extensive “bath mat” of oil on the floor of the gulf near the site of the blowout.

“That may sound far away, but that works its way up through the food chain to some of the fish that we like to catch and we like to eat, as well as the dolphins and the other wildlife that are so iconic in the Gulf of Mexico,” Hoke said.

BP says the damage is minimal and that the company has done everything in its power to “make things right.” Environmentalists are concerned that if the general public doesn’t realize there are ongoing problems in the gulf, offshore drilling will go unchecked.

“There are enormous impacts that go above and beyond that which we see with the BP oil disaster,” Hoke said. “Every time we fly over the coast of Louisiana we see evidence of leakage or spills. We're losing a football field of coastal wetlands every hour and much of that is due to oil and gas development.”

Deepwater Horizon after the blowout.

Tags: BP, Deepwater Horizon, Gulf Restoration Network, Earth Day, Image