

NOAA DIRECTOR LUBCHENCO PLAYS DUMB ON PLUMES

I'm not aware of any studies before this spill, to follow up on those plumes.

That's what NOAA Director Jane Lubchenco claimed a week ago in response to a question from Louisiana Congressman Bill Cassidy.

Elizabeth Birnbaum, who was fired last week because she wasn't engaged enough with this issue (or maybe because they wanted a scapegoat), apparently did know of the studies MMS has been doing going back a decade on the topic.

Well, now Lubchenco is trying to play even dumber than she did last week. As Dan Fromkin reports, she refuses to acknowledge what scientists have shown evidence of for weeks: that much of the oil released from the BP gusher has formed gigantic plumes far below the surface of the Gulf.

Despite more than three weeks of accumulating scientific evidence that gargantuan plumes of oil lurk beneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico – presenting an imminent threat to sea life and a possibly decades-long threat to the nation's coastlines – NOAA Director Jane Lubchenco on Wednesday refused to contradict BP CEO Tony Hayward's statement over the weekend that "the oil is on the surface" and "there aren't any plumes."

[snip]

"I can tell you that there have been a number of anomalies identified by a number of different cruises," she told reporters in a conference call. "Those

anomalies are features at various different depths in the water column that may be oil, they may be other features.”

“It is quite possible that there is oil beneath the surface,” Lubchenco finally acknowledged under repeated questioning. “I think there is reason to believe that may be the case.” But that’s as far as she would go.

More troubling, those ongoing studies Lubchenco boasted of to Congressman Cassidy? NOAA is sitting on the data.

HuffPost has learned that a NOAA-commissioned research cruise the week of May 10 took extensive samples up and down the water column near the Deepwater Horizon spill site – and that those samples have in fact been processed, and logged in with the incident command.

Deborah French McCay is the director of Applied Science Associates, an environmental consulting company based in Rhode Island that is working as part of NOAA’s Natural Resources Damage Assessment. She told HuffPost she organized a mission on the private research vessel *Jack Fitz* more than three weeks ago.

“They went out and sampled all the way up and down the water column,” she said. That included tests for chemistry, oil concentration, temperature, salinity, oil droplet size and so on. Preliminary descriptions clearly indicated the presence of oil beneath the surface – and the final lab results, she said, came in Monday night.

But NOAA hasn’t publicly released those results and a video showing the oil.

Remember how BP stalled before it agreed to release live videos of the oil gushing from its well? Presumably, BP didn't want Americans to know just how bad this disaster is.

This NOAA stonewalling may be worse. The video may not so much evoke the emotional responses that the gusher and the robots do. But it shows that the disaster is far far worse than BP currently admits (and that estimates of the total flow may not have accounted for a significant portion of the oil). Worse, it suggests that the dispersants, which may be making the plumes worse, serve only to hide the damage.

BP has real incentives to hide the abundant evidence that the spill is far worse than we know—and may be doing grave danger underwater where we can't see it.

But you and I pay Director Lubchenco to protect our seas and oceans. And instead, she seems increasingly complicit in BP's efforts to cover-up the extent of their disaster.