

4 Feasible Oil-Spill Ideas from the Public

By [David Teeghman](#) | Thu Jun 10, 2010 10:02 PM ET



None of BP's plans to stop the [oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico](#) have worked so far. First, there was the [Dome](#), and then [Top Kill failed](#) and most recently the [diamond-tipped saw](#) didn't work either.

Americans have relentlessly criticized BP for its handling of the oil spill, and shortly after the catastrophe, began flooding BP's general number with suggestions on how to stop the flow. In response, BP set up the [Deepwater Horizon Response Center](#), which has received more than 80,000 suggestions to date, and has been shared on Facebook more than 1,500 times.

BP spokesman Mark Proegler says about 60 percent of the ideas BP has received are ways to plug the well, while the other 40 percent concern how to clean up the oil spill's disastrous aftermath.

WIDE ANGLE: [Get all the latest news and information about the massive oil spill threatening wetlands and wildlife on the Gulf Coast.](#)

Even though the spill has been going for almost two months, Proegler says the public's interest in helping out has only increased, particularly in the last week.

"We're now getting about 5,000 suggestions a day through the form on our website and over the suggestion hotline, which is a huge increase from when he began," he says.

SLIDE SHOW: [Tech Used to Clean Up Oil Spills](#)

You could say that more ideas are pouring into the response center than oil into the Gulf of Mexico. But you probably shouldn't.

BP and the U.S. Coast Guard have a 40-member team of technical and operational personnel

charged with figuring out if any of the ideas have merit. Initial requests are put into one of three categories:

- › Not feasible
- › Already considered or planned
- › Feasible

Most of the suggestions fall into the first two categories. But if an idea has been deemed feasible, it goes to the next round of analysis. There, it undergoes a much more thorough review by a larger group of team members.

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WATCH VIDEO: Find out why a nuke can't be used to stop the oil spill in the Gulf.

If the idea is still feasible after a second review, it undergoes a field test. Less than one percent of all suggestions reach this stage.

“We do the field tests because it has to work in the conditions we’re given. Most strategies don’t work for water this deep, or the kind of oil we’re dealing with,” Proegler says.

Here are five ideas submitted by members of the public that are getting a lot of attention, and have a decent chance of actually working.

Polymer-Dipped Filter

[Di Gao](#) is an engineering professor at the University of Pittsburgh. He's developed a filter that not only removes the oil from the water, but also allows the oil to be recovered so it can eventually be refined into gasoline. Watch the video; it's worth a view.

The polymer in the filter bonds with the hydrogen molecules in water at the same time that polymer repels oil. When this polymer is applied to a simple cotton filter, it allows water to pass through, but not oil.

Separating Oil from Sand

Proegler says another promising development has come from Clean Beach Technologies. The company has developed a "mechanical solution to separate oil from sand," as Proegler puts it.

The company's CEO Tom Watson says this is part of a three-pronged response plan that is also supposed to include open ocean recovery and marsh reclamation. It's too late for many beaches that already have oil washing up on them, and that's where the company's beach cleaning plan comes into play.

Magnetic Oil Clots

Researchers at Advanced Magnet Lab Inc. want to pour magnetized powder or pellets on the bore hole to form a gigantic "clot" over the leak. The company says bonds of a magnetized alloy of aluminum, nickel and cobalt are so strong, they would stay stuck together in the salt water, ooze over the opening and clog the leak until two relief wells could be drilled.

Kevin Costner: Dances with Oil

[As we reported a couple weeks ago](#), Kevin Costner also has an idea that everyone ([even Congress!](#)) is taking seriously. He's hawking a product from Ocean Therapy Solutions that's basically a giant vacuum that sucks up the oil water, and separates the pollutants through a centrifuge.

BP thinks the product has some promise, since the Ocean Therapy Solutions's CEO John Houghtaling says BP has placed an order for 32 of the machines.

Proegler points out that BP and the public both want to end the spill and clean up the damage as soon as possible. So you can look at the huge outpouring of ideas in one of two ways. Either the public has absolutely no faith in BP to solve a problem that is largely the oil company's fault; or, as Proegler says, you could say it demonstrates "America's can-do attitude and ability to solve any problem."

If you have an idea on how to stop the spill, or clean up its ugly aftermath, there are a couple ways to do it. You can fill out [this online form](#) on the [Horizon Deepwater Response Team's website](#), or you can give their Houston suggestion line a call at (281) 366-5511.

And leave your idea in the comments section below, where your fellow Discovery News readers will parse the suggestions.

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