

There's no question that the gulf oil spill that began more than three months ago threatened to become Obama's Katrina. Public opinion in June, for example, [showed](#) increasing discontent with the President's handling of the disaster; the media [criticized](#) him for vacationing in Maine rather than on the Gulf Coast; and the constant stream of video showing an out of control leak kept the disaster front and center in the news. In fact at one point a majority of Americans [polled](#) thought the federal response to the spill was "even worse than its reaction to Hurricane Katrina."

I can't find any polling data about the spill in the month of August but surely public reaction about the spill and the President's response has got to be rosier. BP has of course succeeded in shutting down the well. The weather this summer [cooperated in a number of different ways](#): threatened hurricanes dissipated; winds stayed light and changes in ocean currents kept oil from being carried into the Florida Keys. But the Obama Administration has also helped itself by releasing a report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on August 4 [claiming](#) that close to 70 percent of the spilled oil has either evaporated, been captured, burned or otherwise eliminated. The administration [has also](#) opened vast amounts of waters to fishing that were closed for months and says that seafood contamination levels are extremely low.

Today's [news](#) is that scientists are questioning NOAA's optimistic claims about the fate of the oil. Some scientists who NOAA claims peer reviewed the study are [telling](#) a different story, saying they spoke only briefly with NOAA scientists and never reviewed the NOAA numbers. And some scientists [are worried](#) that phytoplankton — a food source for seafood — are living in areas with toxic levels of oil in them.

I'm guessing, though, that Obama wins the PR war on this one. Public attention has turned away from the oil spill with the capping of the well. Images of oil lapping up on beaches and animals covered in oil have largely disappeared. So the story that the Obama Administration is telling -that most of the oil is gone and that what's remaining won't hurt you — is a comforting one. With a bad economy, worsening job news, two overseas wars, and a major and unfolding catastrophe in Pakistan, it's easier to believe that the worst is far behind us and to move on to the crisis *du jour*. Moreover Obama's political opponents aren't likely to be keen on characterizing the oil spill as an ongoing catastrophe — to the contrary they want to get on with the business of deepwater oil drilling. Progressive bloggers and environmentalists will create some noise around the edges but my bet is that Obama comes out ahead on this one.