

Earlier today, [Dan asked](#) “How bad is the spill?” He quoted a [New York Times story](#) which suggested that concerns about the spill were overblown.

Not so fast.

Probably the only thing we can say with confidence right now is that it’s still too early to tell exactly how much environmental or economic damage the spill will do. But there’s good reason to think that the NYT’s spin may have been too optimistic.

First, as Tom Turner points out on [Earthjustice’s *UnEarthed* blog](#), the story relied heavily on quotes from Quenton R. Dokken, described as “a marine biologist and the executive director of the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, a conservation group in Corpus Christi, Texas.” When ProPublica [looked into the Gulf of Mexico Foundation](#), it found a board of directors with very strong ties to the oil and gas industry, including eight (of 19) board members directly employed by oil or oil services companies.

Second, the volume of oil spilling into the Gulf may need to be revised up once again. Remember, the initial reports were that there was no leak, then that it was about 1000 barrels (40,000 gallons) per day, then 5000 barrels (200,000 gallons) per day). Late last week, [SkyTruth estimated](#) the rate at more like 26,500 barrels per day, based on the size of the slick to that point. Now, according to the L.A. Times [Greenspace blog](#) (which continues to carry excellent coverage of the spill), BP officials have cited an even bigger estimate — an astonishing 60,000 barrels or 2.5 million gallons per day — in a closed-door briefing for select members of Congress. Compare that to a total release of roughly 11 million gallons from the Exxon Valdez.

Of course, the extent of damage is not simply a function of volume of oil released. We don’t know yet where the slick will go, how long it will persist, or how long it will take the ecosystem and fisheries to recover. We may never know the full extent of the impacts offshore, where they are more difficult to observe. But its not too early to say that this is a major disaster any way we calculate it.