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Oil Spill Predictions

While oil continues to leak from the underground well almost a mile below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico, scientists are predicting where the slick is headed next.

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While oil continues to leak from the underground well almost a mile below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico, scientists are predicting where the slick is headed next.

While current projections are good news for the state of Florida, experts say things can change quickly.

Scientists at the Center for Ocean-Atmospheric Prediction Studies are relying on computer models to show them where oil could be headed next.

However, as the season changes, so could the reliability of those models.

Wind and wave forecasts at COAPS continue to show Florida's Gulf coast free from oil.

And as spring turns to summer, scientists think that's how it will stay.

"Usually winds in the summertime are dominated by southeasterly trades which is favorable for Florida. This keeps the oil, if it's forced by the winds, away from the Florida coast generally." says Steve Morey.

But if the leak can't be contained by the summer, tropical storms could wreak havoc on any forecast models used to predict the flow of the oil slick... as well as plans being made to keep the oil off Florida beaches.

"It could move to a different part of the coast or possibly the loop current and if there were a hurricane that makes landfall, push the oil inland. So it would depend on how strong the storm is and where it makes landfall."

But there could be a silver lining to dark clouds if a tropical storm enters the Gulf.

Strong enough winds could mix surface water with water from below the surface, breaking up the slick

"It lets the natural processes, things that work on helping oil actually dissipate, so that can actually help get rid of some of the oil." says Mark Bourassa

However, scientists at COAPS say even with unknown variables, their models are handling the forecast of the oil slick well.

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