

May 26, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to you in the midst of what may well be the worst environmental disaster in the history of the United States to urge that you give the public access to all monitoring data related to the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico, including past, present and future videos of the live feed maintained by BP of oil spilling on the seabed since the feed was started. Access to all monitoring data is crucial for scientists and the public to understand the extent of the problem, and plan for how to help the area recover and thrive.

Based on a brief clip of BP's feed that has been made available, independent scientists have assessed that the spill may differ from estimates larger than BP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have calculated. Access to all monitoring data is crucial for resolving these conflicting estimates and improving public trust.

Monitoring data, including how much oil is spilling out of the leak, the effects of the oil on the surrounding area, what is being done to stop the leak, and the results of tests on the extent of workers' exposure are matters of great national interest and concern to the public. The livelihoods of families that are reliant on the Gulf Coast's fishing and tourism industries – and others – are at risk. Further, it is too early to tell what the final cost of the disaster will be to public health. Given that the leak is within US Exclusive Economic Zone waters (and therefore within US territory) and operated according to a lease granted by the US government, the US public should have the right to access to the video feed, both past and current, as well as other information about the oil spill and its impact.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent issue. In the interest of meeting your commitment on the first full day in office to “disclose information rapidly in forms that the public can readily find and use,” and your Administration's subsequent statements, policies and directives encouraging the executive branch to give the public prompt access to information that is not required to be withheld, even if there are permissive exemptions, we urge you affirmatively disclose all monitoring data of the leak. To follow up on this matter, please contact Patrice McDermott, Director of OpenTheGovernment.org via email at pmcdermott@openthegovernment.org or phone at 202-332-6736.

Sincerely,

OpenTheGovernment.org

American Library Association

American Association of Law Libraries

Association of Research Libraries

American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression

American Society of News Editors

ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression
Center for Democracy and Technology
Center for Responsive Politics
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
Citizens for Sunshine
Community Research
Defending Dissent Foundation
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Essential Information
Federation of American Scientists
Feminists for Free Expression
First Amendment Project
Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas
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National Freedom of Information Coalition
National Newspaper Association
National Security Archive

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Project On Government Oversight
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Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
Scientific Integrity Program, Union of Concerned Scientists
Society of American Archivists
Society of Professional Journalists
Special Libraries Association
Sunlight Foundation
Archon Fung, Mary Graham, David Weil, co-directors,
Transparency Policy Project, Harvard Kennedy School