

Day 25: August 10, 2010

There is little good to say about day 25 except it is almost over. The rain and seas crashed on us all day. It was so rough at one point that the shock of the wave on the hull would send Johnny and the heavy bench he was sitting on sliding across the room. Our one highlight was Kyle's dinner, which was meat and potatoes, but tasty.

There is not too much to do on a day like this- read, play cards and by the evening the students were together with Roger watching DVDs of the Planet Earth series. When the part came up with Roger's interview- I think it made their day as one day they will recount this evening to their students or their children about how they watched this very show with Roger.

For myself, I watched some, caught up on news, read and did a lot of thinking about the Gulf and the crisis it presents. That is one thing that can occur on days like this one- lots of thinking.

We are now told we are the only marine mammal group studying toxicology. I don't know if that is true and there really is no way to confirm it, but few groups have boats capable of reaching the sperm whales so it's possible. There was a NOAA ship focusing on some toxicology in whales, but we are told now they are not going to follow through with that aspect. This development surprises me, and only makes our efforts that much more important.

I see the reports that the oil is all gone - only 25% remains in the Gulf. This news is stunning to me because it not only cannot be true, it is deceptively misleading. First, it's not true because how did they get rid of it - chemical dispersants. What are those designed to do- drag the oil deeper into the water column out of view. So the oil is still there in the Gulf it is just deeper in the water. You just can't see it as well. Second, I have heard the estimate is now 200,000,000 gallons of oil entered the Gulf. If 25% is left then that's 50,000,000 gallons or about 5-times the amount of the Exxon Valdez spill. That is still a huge amount of oil. Thus, even if much of it wasn't simply deeper in the water due to dispersants, it's still a ton of oil and far from gone.

I also saw the report from the FDA that the seafood is safe. I noticed that no data was provided to support that claim. In thinking about it, I also realized that it is way too early to tell. You see the typical accumulation pathway for pollutants in the ocean is that the pollutant enters a microscopic organism. A small fish eats those microscopic organisms. Then a bigger fish eats the smaller fish and so on. The point being that 4 months is not enough time for accumulation up the food chain to occur. So if the FDA did measure levels in fish and found nothing- and simply are not sharing their data- it's probably because it's too soon to find anything.

This possibility caused me to think more about our efforts and I have realized that a better approach may be to spend these three months gather samples as a critically

needed baseline and then wait 6 months to complete the second three months of this Voyage to see if we are starting to see accumulation. We are now considering the merits of this plan.

I certainly do not consider myself a conspiracy theorist and in general I believe our government at least tries to move in the right direction, though given its size and diversity of thought, it is slow and cumbersome to do so. But these claims made so quickly after the oil was stopped just seem absurd and irresponsible. The data are simply not in yet to make such grand pronouncements. In the end, I hope they are proven right. I hope are data showing that the mammals in the Gulf are completely unaffected. Time and hard work will tell.

In the meantime, we are closing in on midnight and will soon be at dock in St. Petersburg. Iain has procured 1 array on loan from IFAW and I another from our collaborator in Scotland at St. Andrews. Thus, the array problem should be solved. That leaves the generator and I hope that is resolved quickly and easily.

Good night.

John