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**Harte Research Institute Scientists Traveling to Site of Ixtoc I Oil Spill to Determine Repercussions of Deepwater Horizon Disaster**  
Thirty years later, expedition revisits Bay of Campeche to study long-term effects  

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Scientists with the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) are preparing for the second in a series of expeditions to the site of the 1979 Ixtoc I oil spill to gather information that will help predict the long-term effects of the Deepwater Horizon disaster off the Louisiana Coast.  

On Monday, July 5, HRI Associate Director Wes Tunnell will lead a team of scientists to the Bay of Campeche where on June 3, 1979, the Ixtoc I exploratory well blew out spewing an estimated 140 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico before it was finally capped more than nine months later. At that time, the Ixtoc I spill was the largest peacetime oil spill in history, and since it occurred in the same body of water as the BP Deepwater Horizon, scientists hope to answer questions that are applicable to the April 20 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon platform.  

The Deepwater Horizon platform is located about 50 miles southeast of the Mississippi Delta in the Mississippi Canyon in about 5,000 feet of water. Various attempts to cap the well have been unsuccessful and it continues to release millions of gallons of oil and gas that are impacting the salt marshes of the Mississippi Delta in Louisiana, and beaches of Mississippi, Alabama, and western Florida.  

The Ixtoc I well was located on the continental shelf in about 170 feet of water about 50 miles north of Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, Mexico. The HRI team will revisit selected sites where Ixtoc oil/tar has been observed along the shores of the southern Gulf of Mexico over the last 30 years.

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“Since there were no comprehensive or long-term studies conducted after the Ixtoc I blow out, these expeditions will reveal the status of oil and tar on sandy beaches, rocky shores, and coral reefs,” said Tunnell. “We will also interview fishermen and coastal communities in the areas impacted to see how their lives and jobs were changed or altered, and how long the effects lasted.”

Over the past three decades, Dr. Tunnell has made numerous trips to the site of the Ixtoc I spill to study a total of 12 shoreline habitats around the southern Gulf. During July and August 1980, he traveled the southern Gulf shorelines looking specifically for oil from Ixtoc I on sandy beaches, rocky seashores, and coral reefs. In addition, until the mid-1990s he was able make annual trips to study sites on the coral reefs of Veracruz, Mexico. In 2002, during a Sustainable Seas Expedition to the Veracruz reefs, he was able to relocate the Ixtoc I tar mats tracked through time.