

BCBR Article

DigitalGlobe satellite photos chronicling oil spill in Gulf

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LONGMONT — Color photographs of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico taken by Longmont-based DigitalGlobe Inc.'s constellation of satellites have been providing authorities, news media and the curious with real-time views of the devastation.

The images are chronicling the massive oil slick created after the April 20 explosion of BP PLC's Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf.

Earlier this month, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency signed a 12-month contract for DigitalGlobe's Crisis Event Service that provides timely satellite imagery. The service has been in effect during the oil spill crisis, providing before and after photographs that offer insight into the impact of the spill.

"DigitalGlobe's collection capacity has changed what can be done with geospatial imagery," said David Robinson, DigitalGlobe's senior director of U.S. National Security Programs. "Recent events have demonstrated the potentially life-saving benefits of rapidly available, pre- and post-event satellite imagery, and we are excited to continue to support the NGA by offering timely access to critical insight and information that aids in planning and relief efforts."

DigitalGlobe's photographs were used extensively in the aftermath of January's devastating earthquake in Haiti to assess damage and identify areas of need. Satellite imagery has proven to be a useful decision-support tool when on-ground accessibility is difficult or dangerous.

For the spill in the Gulf, DigitalGlobe's photos are being taken by its QuickBird, WorldView-1 and WorldView-2 satellites. WorldView-2's orbit is the highest altitude of the three at about 448 miles above the Earth's surface.

"Up until this point, DigitalGlobe's imagery of the oil spill in the Gulf has offered the ability to monitor the spread of the oil — not only in the Gulf itself but also the southern U.S. and Mexico," said Steve Wood, DigitalGlobe's vice president of U.S. defense sales and business development.

"With our three-satellite constellation, we have intraday revisit capabilities, allowing us to capture new imagery day after day."

Wood expects as time goes by and the oil continues to wash up on shore, DigitalGlobe's eight-band multispectral technology will play an increasingly critical role.

He said the photographs will provide enough detail to allow analysts to determine the impact of the spill on plants and the ecosystem as it penetrates the shoreline.