



Joey Lin/Daily Texan Staff

UT scientist Carl Oppenheimer displays two oil samples he will use to study the massive Persian Gulf spill.

# UT scientist to fight oil spill

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A UT marine scientist who developed a oil-eating bacteria which may be enlisted to combat the 500-million-gallon oil spill in the Persian Gulf predicted Tuesday that, with war raging, the job could take more than one year.

Carl Oppenheimer, the scientist who developed bioremediation, a process that uses oil-eating bacteria, said it could take the bacteria a year or more to finish the work because of the enormous size of the slick. But he also said it may be the only realistic option.

"I wouldn't want to be out there in booms and skimmers for weeks or months while a war raged on all around me," Oppenheimer said.

Bioremediation uses 50 to 100 species of bacteria in a water mix, Oppenheimer explained. The mix is sprayed on the edges of an oil slick, and the bacteria consume the oil un-

til it is gone, at which point they die. The only thing the microbes leave behind is a fatty acid emulsion on which normal marine life loves to dine.

John Zeiner, a representative of Alpha Environmental Corp. of Austin, said Saudi Arabian officials contacted the firm Friday in regard to the massive oil slick along the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, but he does not know when or if the company will go to the gulf.

"All we can really do is sit and wait for notification," Zeiner said.

If the Saudi government opts for bioremediation, Oppenheimer's technology will be used by Alpha Environmental, which will work with the Texas General Land Office and MTECH Environmental Services Inc., a Fort Worth-based company.

Rick Roark, vice president of MTECH, said his company helped in bioremediation efforts in both the Apex barge spill in Galveston Bay last July and the Mega Borg spill last

June.

But the Mega Borg spill and the spill in Galveston Bay totaled only 4.6 million gallons of crude. The Persian Gulf oil slick is composed of 460 million gallons and is 35 miles by 10 miles long, which makes it the largest oil spill ever.

Ron Calhoun, public information director for the Texas General Land Office, said Garry Mauro, Texas land commissioner, has offered the Saudi government assistance in the form of oil spill experts.

"We'll do anything we can to help," Calhoun said. "But we'd probably be most effective in an advisory role."

Calhoun added that bioremediation would most probably be used to keep the oil away from desalination lines which provide two-thirds of Saudi Arabia's 18 million people with water. U.S. officials said Monday that the spill was moving south 15 miles a day and was 100 miles north of Jubail, the site of the world's largest desalination plant.