MIT develops oil-skimming robots to gobble up future spills

By Brett Michael Dykes
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In the wake of this spring's Deepwater Horizon catastrophe, critics assailed the oil and gas industry for its inadequate preparations for cleaning up and containing massive oil spills. Now, researchers at MIT heard the siren call and have sprung to the industry's rescue.

The MIT team has developed a device called the Seaswarm robot, which, according to the university, "uses a photovoltaic-powered conveyor belt made of a thin nanowire mesh to propel itself and collect oil." The aforementioned nanomaterial was patented by MIT and can allegedly absorb up to 20 times its weight in oil.

Once the Seaswarm has absorbed the oil from the surface, it can either burn the oil off using an internal heater, or it can bag the oil and deposit it on the ocean surface, where human workers would retrieve it for reuse or recycling. The robots are designed to work in a swarm, using GPS technology to communicate with each other. Here's a rather ironic kicker: The Seaswarm robots are powered by solar energy.

You can watch a video demonstration of the Seaswarm after the jump: