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***This story has been updated***

Giant oil-services provider Halliburton may be a primary suspect in the investigation into the oil rig explosion that has devastated the Gulf Coast, [the Wall Street Journal reports](#).

Though the investigation into the explosion that sank the Deepwater Horizon site is still in its early stages, drilling experts agree that blame probably lies with flaws in the "cementing" process -- that is, plugging holes in the pipeline seal by pumping cement into it from the rig. Halliburton was in charge of cementing for Deepwater Horizon.

"The initial likely cause of gas coming to the surface had something to do with the cement," said Robert MacKenzie, managing director of energy and natural resources at FBR Capital Markets and a former cementing engineer in the oil industry.

The problem could have been a faulty cement plug at the bottom of the well, he said. Another possibility would be that cement between the pipe and well walls didn't harden properly and allowed gas to pass through it.

The possibility of Halliburton's culpability was [first reported Monday by HuffPost's Marcus Baram](#).

According to a lawsuit filed in federal court by Natalie Roshto, whose husband Shane, a deck floor hand, was thrown overboard by the force of the explosion and whose body has not yet been located, Halliburton is culpable for its actions prior to the incident.

The suit claims that the company "prior to the explosion, was engaged in cementing operations of the well and well cap and, upon information and belief, improperly and negligently performed these duties, which was a cause of the explosion."

And Congressman Henry Waxman, the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, sent a tough letter on Friday to Halliburton, asking for an explanation of its work on the rig, according to a spokesperson for the committee.

Last year, Halliburton was also implicated for its cementing work prior to a massive blowout off the coast of Australia, where a rig caught on fire and spewed hundreds of thousands of gallons into the sea for ten weeks.

In that incident, workers apparently failed to properly pump cement into the well, according to Elmer Danenberger, former head of regulatory affairs for the U.S. Minerals Management Service, who testified to an Australian commission probing that accident.

"The problem with the cementing job was one of the root causes in the Australian blowout," Danenberger told Huffington Post, adding that the rig crew didn't pick up on indications of an influx of fluids coming back in after they cemented the casing. "The crew didn't pick up on them and didn't take action."

Halliburton declined to return a detailed request for comment from Huffington Post.

The company did issue a press release responding to reports about its work on the rig:

As one of several service providers on the rig, Halliburton can confirm the following:

-- Halliburton performed a variety of services on the rig, including cementing, and had four employees stationed on the rig at the time of the accident. Halliburton's employees returned to shore safely, due, in part, to the brave rescue efforts by the U.S. Coast Guard and other organizations.

-- Halliburton had completed the cementing of the final production casing string in accordance with the well design approximately 20 hours prior to the incident. The cement slurry design was consistent with that utilized in other similar applications.

-- In accordance with accepted industry practice approved by our customers, tests demonstrating the integrity of the production casing string were completed.

-- At the time of the incident, well operations had not yet reached the point requiring the placement of the final cement plug which would enable the planned temporary abandonment of the well, consistent with normal oilfield practice.

-- We are assisting with planning and engineering support for a wide range of options designed to secure the well, including a potential relief well.

Halliburton continues to assist in efforts to identify the factors that may have lead up to the disaster, but it is premature and irresponsible to speculate on any specific causal issues.

Halliburton originated oilfield cementing and leads the world in effective, efficient delivery of zonal isolation and engineering for the life of the well, conducting thousands of successful well cementing jobs each year. The company views safety as critical to its success and is committed to continuously improve performance.