

## Briefing Statement

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**Bureau:** National Park Service  
**Issue:** Mississippi Canyon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico—Public Health Information for Visitors  
**Park Sites:** Gulf Coast (GUIS, JELA, PAIS) and South Florida (BICY, BISC, DESO, DRTO, EVER) NPS units  
**Date:** May 14, 2010

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**Background:** Despite the nation's best efforts to prevent spills, approximately 14,000 oil spills occur each year. On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig exploded 41 miles from the Louisiana coast. Since the explosion, an estimated 210,000 gallons of oil per day have been leaking into the Gulf of Mexico from several oil wells a mile below the water's surface. To date, oil has not yet reached landfall at any NPS units, and no parks have reported closures.

NPS continues to monitor this situation and is working with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other federal agencies through a unified command structure to quickly respond to this incident and minimize impacts. Besides the obvious threats of the oil spill on wildlife, marshlands, and coastal communities, the oil spill and its associated recovery efforts can also pose human health risks. This briefing statement summarizes the oil spill public health response efforts and provides common sense health guidance for visitors.

### Current Status:

- Oil spill status and federal response rapidly evolving; please see <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/site/2931/> for the most up-to-date information
- Human health effects of oil spills and prevention measures
  - Primary health effects from direct contact, inhalation of airborne chemicals or particulates, and ingestion of oil-contaminated seafood, water, sand, or soil.
  - At this time, there are no indications of any health risks due to the oil spill at NPS units. The NPS is working with state health departments and environmental agencies to monitor beach, water, and air quality and will inform visitors if conditions become unsafe.
  - Consider the following tips for avoiding negative health impacts from an oiled shoreline:
    - Avoid entering areas where oil can be seen or smelled.
    - Avoid direct skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water and sediments. If oil makes contact with skin, wash it off with soap and water.
    - Avoid swimming, skiing, or boating in areas affected by the oil spill.
    - Do not fish in oil spill-affected waters.
    - Do not harvest or eat dead fish, fish with an oily residue, or fish that have a petroleum odor.
    - Young children, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and individuals with underlying respiratory conditions should avoid the area and/or stay indoors.
    - Prevent pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.
- Other human health and safety issues
  - Besides the direct health effects of the oil spill, visitors (particularly those volunteering to assist in recovery efforts) should be aware of other health risks that may be encountered at Gulf Coast and Florida parks and to take appropriate precautions. These risks include but are not limited to:

- Mosquito and tick-borne diseases (e.g. West Nile virus and Rocky Mountain spotted fever)
    - Heat-related illness
    - Contact with stinging animals (e.g. rattlesnakes, jellyfish) or toxic plants
    - Food or water-borne diseases (e.g. Salmonella, Vibrio)
    - Injury
  - Links and fact sheets with additional information on these health issues can be found at the public health tab for the “Mississippi Canyon Oil Spill Respons” link on Inside NPS.
- NPS public health actions (as of May 14)
  - Office of Public Health
    - Actively participating in DOI and NPS Emergency Management Teams
    - CAPT Theresa McDarmont, Public Health Consultant, deployed to GUIS on May 1 and will be relieved by CAPT Paul Robinson
      - On-site subject matter expert in conjunction with NPS Western Incident Management Team Safety Officer
      - Assisted in developing pre- and post-landfall assessment plans for monitoring beaches, wells, and air quality
      - Conducted all-hands employee meetings at GUIS-MS and GUIS-FL
      - Assessed public health needs on major islands (e.g. Horn and Ship)
      - Evaluated concessions operations and other visitor services
      - Provided health and safety information and assisted with responder training
    - LCDR George Larsen, Public Health Consultant, deployed to WASO Office of Public Health
      - Assist CAPT Chuck Higgins in coordinating public health response at DOI and NPS level
      - Coordinate working group on white paper on public health implications of oil spill
    - LTJG Rachael Lee, Public Health Consultant, assigned to NPS Emergency Management Team
      - Writing daily reports with WASO senior staff
      - Participating in DOI Emergency Management Coordinators meeting
    - White Paper “Oil Spills: Public Health Implications”
      - NPS (LCDR George Larsen, LTJG Rachael Lee, LCDR Amy Chanlongbutra) and RM (LCDR Michael Quinn) authoring a peer-reviewed white paper on human health effects of oil exposure, to include dermal and respiratory exposure, and ingestion of oil contaminated seafood.
- How visitors can help
  - Stay informed of the evolving oil spill situation
  - Pay attention to local, state, and park-specific public health advisories
  - Practice good personal hygiene, especially vigilant hand washing with soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers
  - If you become ill, contact your healthcare provider for advice
  - To report oiled/distressed wildlife, contact a ranger or call 866-557-1401
  - To express interest in volunteering or to report an oiled shoreline, contact a ranger or call 866-448-5816
- State oil response websites
  - Louisiana (<http://emergency.louisiana.gov/>)

- Mississippi (<http://www.mississippi.gov/>)
  - Florida (<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/default.htm>)
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