National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Mississippi Canyon Oil Spill Response

Public Health Talking Points

Risks to Human Health Associated with Crude Oil Exposure

- **Direct contact** with oil.
- **Inhalation** of airborne chemicals or particulates.
- **Ingestion** of oil-contaminated water or seafood.

Health effects vary based on the route and duration of exposure.

Current and Potential Public Health Issues: Air Quality

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is monitoring the air quality for volatile chemical vapors emitted from the oil spill and particulate matter/toxic chemicals generated during controlled burning activities.
  - Chemical vapors released are a mixture of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
  - Inhalation of VOCs can lead to a number of short (e.g., irritation of the eyes, skin, nose, and respiratory system) and long-term health effects (e.g., respiratory problems).
  - Controlled burning generates particulates and toxic gases that degrade ambient air quality.
- EPA is posting air quality monitoring data at the following: http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/air.html.

Water Quality

- EPA and its state partners are collecting coastal water samples to determine potential threats to human health.
- The oil spill is not currently expected to affect drinking water supplies in public communities at Gulf Island National Park and Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve; however, drinking water and waste water issues may pose a problem if national parks in southeast Florida (Everglades, Biscayne, and Dry Tortugas) are impacted.
- EPA is posting coastal water quality monitoring data at the following: http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/water.html.

Seafood Consumption

- Oil can taint fish and shellfish rendering it unpalatable and unsafe.
- Federal and state authorities have closed a large area of the Gulf to commercial fishing and shellfishing.
- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are monitoring the seafood safety issues. Adulterated seafood will be removed from the food supply chain.

Occupational Exposures

- Spill response personnel can be exposed to hazardous oil constituents via inhalation and direct skin and mucous membrane contact. The personal protective equipment (PPE) worn and training must meet the level of exposure and activity a person is performing.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the National Response Team (NRT), and federal and state organizations are working to determine risks for cleanup and support services.
- The National Park Service and other agencies are operating in a joint command structure to ensure that safety plans and training requirements are consistent for all response workers.