

NOAA Web Update July 10, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Saturday 10 July —

At the Administration's Direction, BP Begins "Capping Stack" Procedure

After receiving approval from National Incident Commander Admiral Thad Allen, BP began its "capping stack" procedure—designed to capture even greater quantities of oil than the current "top hat" system. Admiral Allen issued the following statement on his decision to allow BP to move forward with this strategy:

"After reviewing Bob Dudley's response to my July 8 letter outlining BP's proposed plan of action for oil containment efforts, and consulting top government scientists and engineers including Secretary Chu, I approved BP's plan to simultaneously install the *Helix Producer* and "capping stack" containment mechanisms, which will require temporary suspension of the current top hat containment system. I validated this plan because the capacity for oil containment when these installations are complete will be far greater than the capabilities we have achieved using current systems. In addition, favorable weather expected over the coming days will provide the working conditions necessary for these transitions to be successfully completed without delays. The transition to this new containment infrastructure could begin in the next days but will take seven to ten days to complete. I have also directed BP to provide daily briefings and regular informational updates to the media throughout this capping process."

BP also is in the process of connecting a third vessel, the *Helix Producer*, which will increase collection capacity to an estimated 53,000 barrels per day by bringing additional oil up through the kill line—a redundancy measure also taken at the administration's direction.

Throughout this response, the federal government has directed BP to develop more detailed plans, create redundancy measures in case those plans fail, and apply additional resources to the largest response to an oil spill in our nation's history.

NOAA Response

New Fact Sheet: [What to Expect in South Florida from the Deepwater Horizon/BP Oil Spill](#) (Document format: PDF, size: 399.9 K).

NOAA provides coordinated scientific weather and biological response services to federal, state and local organizations. Experts from across the agency have mobilized to help contain the spreading oil spill and protect the Gulf of Mexico's many marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, shellfish, and other endangered marine life. NOAA spill specialists are advising the U.S. Coast Guard on cleanup options as well as advising all affected federal, state and local partners on sensitive marine resources at risk in this area of the Gulf of Mexico. Overflights are conducted on a daily basis (weather permitting) to provide

field verification of model trajectories. NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) is supporting the response work in the Gulf with NOAA-owned ships and aircraft. Currently, NOAA has deployed six NOAA owned vessels in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Please see [GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse](https://geoplatform.gov/gulfresponse) for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

Trajectories

Winds are expected to be southwesterly to westerly at 10 knots (kts) or less throughout this forecast period. Remote sensing imagery and overflights have indicated scattered areas of potential oil remaining in Chandeleur and Mississippi Sound, which will continue to threaten the coastlines of Mississippi and Alabama west of Mobile Bay, as well as within Lakes Borgne and Ponchartrain in Louisiana. To the west, models indicate that patches of oil observed off Marsh Island, Caillou Bay, and Terrebonne Bay will begin to move eastward, with scattered shoreline impacts between Caillou Bay and Southwest Pass. Further to the west, no oil has been observed west of Atchafalaya Bay since Monday. For the Alabama-Florida Panhandle coast, models show eastward coastal currents occurring over the next few days, leading to an eastward extension of forecast uncertainty bounds into Florida.

OR&R's modeling team continues to generate daily trajectories for the nearshore surface oil. The offshore trajectory maps (showing oil interacting with the Loop Current) have been temporarily suspended because the northern end of the Loop Current has been pinched off into a large eddy (Eddy Franklin) so there is no clear path for oil to enter the Loop Current from the source. Also, there have been no reports of recoverable oil in the Loop Current or Eddy Franklin and the oil has moved to the north and away from the Eddy Franklin. We will continue to monitor the area with overflights, vessel observations, and satellite analysis. When the threat of shoreline impacts to the Florida Keys increases, we will resume producing the offshore trajectory maps.

The Loop Current is an area of warm water that comes up from the Caribbean, flowing past the Yucatan Peninsula and into the Gulf of Mexico. It generally curves east across the Gulf and then flows south parallel to the west Florida coast. An eddy is water that rotates.

Closures

There is no change to the fisheries closure area today. The July 4 closure ([see map](#)) remains in effect. This federal closure does not apply to any state waters. Closing fishing in these areas is a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers. The new closure measures 81,181 sq mi (210,259 sq km) and covers about 34 percent of the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. This leaves more than 65 percent of Gulf federal waters available for fishing. Any changes to the closure are announced daily at 12 p.m. Eastern at sero.nmfs.noaa.gov and take effect at 6 p.m. Eastern the same day.

Sea Turtles and Marine Mammals (effective July 9, 2010)

Sea Turtles:

A total of 631 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to July 9 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Eleven live sea turtles, four oiled turtles from the waters off Florida and 6 oiled and one unoiled from the waters off Louisiana, were captured in directed, on water surveys by members of the Wildlife Branch of the Unified Area Command and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. In addition, one live oiled turtle stranded off Alabama. There are 161 live sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 120 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 41 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 136 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 631 turtles verified from April 30 to July 9, a total of 448 stranded turtles were found dead, 56 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Eleven live stranded turtles were released, and 41 live stranded turtles are being cared for at rehabilitation centers. This report contains some corrected numbers from earlier reports. Turtle strandings during this time period have been much higher in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle than in previous years for this same time period. This may be due in part to increased detection and reporting, but this does not fully account for the increase.

Whales:

The NOAA Ship *Pisces* reported a dead 25-foot sperm whale on June 15, 2010, that was located 150 miles due south of Pascagoula, Mississippi and approximately 77 miles due south of the spill site last week. The whale was decomposed and heavily scavenged. Samples of skin and blubber have been taken and will be analyzed. The whale had not evidence of external oil. Sperm whales are the only endangered resident cetacean in the Upper Gulf of Mexico. There are no records of stranded whales in the Gulf of Mexico for the month of June for the period 2003-2007.

Dolphins:

From April 30 to July 9, 61 stranded dolphins have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 61 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Fifty-three dolphins were found stranded dead. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on five dolphins, two live and three dead stranded animals. We are unable at this time to determine whether three of the dead stranded dolphins were externally oiled before or after death. Since April 30, the stranding rate for dolphins in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle has been higher than the historic numbers for the same time period in previous years. In part, this may be due to increased detection and reporting and the lingering effects of an earlier observed spike in strandings for the winter of 2010.

A stranding is defined as a dead or debilitated animal that washes ashore or is found in the water. NOAA and its partners are analyzing the cause of death for the dead stranded and dead captured sea turtles and the stranded marine mammals.

Assessment

To help determine the type and amount of restoration needed to compensate the public for harm to natural resources as a result of the spill, a [Natural Resource Damage Assessment](#) (Document format: PDF, size: 90.8 K) will be conducted by NOAA and our co-trustee agencies. Although many agencies are involved in this process, NOAA is a lead federal trustee for coastal and marine natural resources, including marine and migratory fish, endangered species, marine mammals and their habitats. The focus currently is to assemble existing data on resources and their habitats and collect baseline (pre-spill impact) data. Data on oiled resources and habitats are also being collected. For additional information, see the [DARRP Deepwater Horizon Web page](#).