

NOAA Web Update July 11, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Sunday 11 July —

Largest Oil Spill Response Continues; Skimmers Mass at Well Site

NEW ORLEANS--The Unified Area Command announced Sunday that the skimmer fleet supporting the Deepwater Horizon Response Operations doubled the volume of oil skimmed near the well site Saturday.

The skimming armada capitalized on good weather conditions and surged to the site to confront the anticipated increased oil flow from the current operation to remove the top cap and install the capping stack. The skimmers were able to skim an estimated 25,500 barrels of oily water Saturday, doubling the amount collected the previous day.

"As BP transitions to the new cap, we have massed our best skimming forces at the source of the oil, 40 miles offshore," said Rear Adm. James Watson, Federal On-Scene Coordinator for the Deepwater Horizon Response. "The skimmers join a total force of 65 vessels that are supporting an effort to kill the well and collect the oil offshore before it hits the beaches and marshes. This represents the world's largest collection of skimmers located in one area. These are a very important few days and we will continue to work around the clock and use everything at our disposal to mitigate the oil's impacts."

Currently 46 skimmers are operating at the well site, where crews continue to work around the clock to place a new capping stack on the blowout preventer to contain the oil. The skimmer force working at the well site is part of the fleet of more than 570 skimmers conducting the largest oil spill response in U.S. history.

Controlled burn task forces operating in a wider band around the source were able to conduct 15 controlled burns Saturday, further assisting the skimmer fleet and the *Q4000* containment vessel in mitigating the additional flow from subsea operations.

The *Helix Producer* is expected to begin operations Sunday.

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 for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

Trajectories

Winds are expected to be mostly southwesterly to westerly at 10 knots or less throughout this forecast period. Remote sensing imagery and overflights have indicated scattered areas of potential oil remaining in northern Chandeleur and Mississippi Sound, which will continue to threaten the coastlines of Mississippi and Alabama. 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. 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 Atchafalaya Bay and Southwest Pass. Further west, a patch of floating oil observed between Galveston and Sabine Pass is projected to move eastward, threatening the shoreline around the Texas-Louisiana border.

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 10, 2010)

A total of 643 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to July 10 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Ten live oiled turtles were captured in directed on water surveys by members of the Wildlife Branch of the Unified Area Command. Nine were captured off Venice, Louisiana, and one off Destin, Florida. Two dead turtles stranded, one in Alabama and an oiled turtle in Louisiana. There are 171 live sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 130 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 41 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 147 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 643 turtles verified from April 30 to July 10, a total of 450 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.

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.

From April 30 to July 10, 62 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 62 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Fifty-seven 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](#).