

NOAA Web Update June 23, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Wednesday 23 June –

While the capture of oil and gas through the blowout preventer's choke line to the Q4000 vessel on the surface continues, the use of the lower marine riser package (LMRP) containment cap was temporarily suspended today when a discharge of liquids was observed from a diverter valve on the drill ship *Discoverer Enterprise*. As a precautionary measure, the LMRP containment cap system, which is attached to the *Discover Enterprise*, was removed to ensure the safety of operations and allow the unexpected release of liquids to be analyzed.

Due to severe weather conditions expected across southeast Louisiana today, June 23, regularly scheduled cleanup and response efforts may be impacted/halted as weather systems move through the area. These efforts include controlled burns, dispersant flights, and booming operations. Source efforts and some skimming vessels may be operating as long as conditions do not exceed their operating limits. Protective boom is in place along many miles of Louisiana's coastline. Crews will resume cleanups as soon as safely possible. Safety of all personnel is important to the success of this operation. Scattered showers and thunderstorms are expected today, as well as frequent lightning and wind gusts up to 40 miles per hour.

NOAA Response

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. Please see GeoPlatform.gov/gulfresponse for further information on the federal response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident.

Trajectories

Moderate SE winds (7-12 knots) are forecast to continue through Wednesday then become E on Thursday/Friday. Trajectories indicate developing westward currents within the Mississippi Bight region will begin to inhibit further movement of the slick to the east. Coastal regions between Ship Island, Mississippi and Panama City, Florida are threatened by shoreline contacts within this forecast period. Under persistent SE and E winds, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound and the Mississippi Delta are increasingly threatened by shoreline contacts in this forecast period.

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

NOAA has opened more than 8,000 square miles of previously closed fishing area in the Gulf of Mexico, because the agency has not observed oil in the area ([see map](#); PDF, 784 K). The most significant opening is an area due south of Mississippi which was closed Monday, June 21. Additionally, some smaller areas were opened off the Louisiana and central Florida coasts. These areas were initially closed as a precaution because oil was projected to be within those areas over the next few days. However, the review of satellite imagery, radar and aerial data indicated that oil had not moved into these areas.

The federal closed area does not apply to any state waters. Closing fishing in this area is a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers.

The closed area now represents 78,597 square miles, which is approximately 32.5 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves more than two-thirds of Gulf federal waters available for fishing. The last closed area modification was June 21, when 86,985 square miles were closed to fishing, or roughly 36 percent of federal waters of the Gulf. 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 June 22, 2010)

A total of 535 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to June 22 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Between Monday, June 21, and Tuesday, June 22, 8 turtle strandings were verified (One live turtle from Florida and four dead from Florida, three dead turtles from Mississippi). There are now 117 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 83 sea turtles captured as part of on-water survey and rescue operations, and 34 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 92 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include the 81 captured or collected turtles from on-water operations (75 live turtles, 3 collected dead and 3 found alive that died in rehabilitation), six live stranded turtles (two caught in oil skimming operations), and five dead stranded sea turtles. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 535 turtles verified from April 30 to June 22, a total of 403 stranded turtles were found dead, 42 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 34 live stranded turtles are being cared for at rehabilitation centers. 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** 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. Sperm whales are the only endangered resident cetacean in the Upper Gulf of Mexico.

From April 30 to June 22, 50 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area - no change from June 21. Of the total 50 stranded dolphins, 46 dolphins stranded dead, four dolphins stranded alive and two of those have subsequently died, one on the beach and the other euthanized. The other two include one in rehabilitation at Audubon Aquarium and one freed from between two oil booms. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on three dolphins. However, we are unable at this time to determine whether two of the dolphins were externally oiled before or after death. The third dolphin was the one freed from between booms. 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

NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) is conducting a [Natural Resource Damage Assessment](#) (PDF, 89 K). 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.