

NOAA Web Update July 4, 2010 DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Sunday 04 July

HOUMA, La. – Crews throughout the Deepwater Horizon response branches in Louisiana are checking deployed boom and surveying for additional oil deposits after heavy weather moved through the area beginning Sunday, June 27.

Heavy winds and waves have blown sand across beaches, burying oil and boom. Reports of damaged and stranded boom have been received from Plaquemines, Terrebonne, Iberia, Jefferson and Lafourche parishes. Crews are beginning a systematic effort to repair any boom that has been damaged.

Heavy waves have eroded sand along beaches, exposing oil that had been buried by natural sand build-up along the coasts. Beaches in Grand Isle, Louisiana, in particular, have had sand eroded away, exposing buried oil.

"There is a long-term treatment plan for Grand Isle which includes the collection and washing of oiled sand, including buried oil," said Don Ballard, the operations director for the Grand Isle branch. "Part of this plan includes collecting and storing oiled sand in piles for later cleaning. At no time has clean sand been used by clean-up crews to cover or bury oil or oiled sand."

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

Strong E winds are forecast to persist into Sunday, then transition to persistent SE winds through next week with speeds of 10-15 knots. Due to the northwest movement of the slick over the past several

days, the coastlines of Mississippi, Alabama, and the Florida Panhandle west of Pensacola continue to be threatened by shoreline contacts. An overflight today to western Mississippi Sound saw light sheens near Horn and Ship Island, but no oil further to the west. With strong easterly winds, the Chandeleur Islands, Breton Sound, and the Mississippi Delta also continue to be threatened. Only scattered sheens have been observed on recent overflights to the west of the Delta – strong westward currents will transport these sheens rapidly to the west. Models suggest more oil may be moved west of the Delta, threatening shorelines as far west as Caillou Bay within 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 Modifies Commercial and Recreational Fishing Closure in the Oil-Affected Portions of the Gulf of Mexico

All commercial and recreational fishing, including catch and release, is prohibited in the closed area ([see map](#)); however, transit through the area is allowed. The new closure measures 81,181 square miles (210,259 square kilometers) and covers about 34% of the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. The majority of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico are open to commercial and recreational fishing. Modeling and mapping the actual and projected spill area is not an exact science. NOAA Fisheries Service strongly advises fishermen not to fish in areas where oil or oil sheens (very thin layers of floating oil) are present, even if those areas are not currently closed to 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 3, 2010)

The Unified Area Command continues to build a sea turtle observer program for all on-water oil clean up operations. The observers will primarily focus on controlled burn and skimmer fleet operations. The command's Wildlife Branch is working now to determine when, where, and how observers can be best positioned to reduce risks posed to sea turtles by oil containment and clean-up activities. In addition, the Wildlife Branch will begin to train additional sea turtle observers this weekend.

Throughout the spill, federal and state biologists have been surveying for and rescuing oiled sea turtles offshore using small vessels carrying trained sea turtle collection teams. If sea turtle observers can improve the sighting and collection of sea turtles prior to burn and skimming operations, then this is another way to reduce risks posed to turtles by the oil spill. In offshore waters, both free floating patches of sargassum seaweed and spilled oil tend to accumulate in convergence zones, places in the ocean where strong opposing currents meet. Sea turtles, especially juveniles, use these areas for food and cover. Burn operations sometimes occur there because of aggregated oil. Burn operations are managed by the Unified Area Command and are not to occur if wildlife are spotted prior to ignition. Burns can be stopped immediately by allowing fire-resistant boom surrounding the operation to open and the oil to spread too thin to support combustion. For more on the United Area Command observer program, go to <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/doc/2931/734531/>.

No turtle or dolphin strandings or rescues were reported on July 3. A total of 598 sea turtles have been verified from April 30 to July 3 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida (one dead and one live stranded turtle from Alabama, both oiled, and one live debilitated loggerhead recovered offshore by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries). There are 147 sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 100 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 47 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 115 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 598 **turtles** verified from April 30 to July 3, a total of 436 stranded turtles were found dead, 55 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Four live stranded turtles were released, and 47 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 3, 56 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 56 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Fifty one 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](#).