

NOAA Web Update July 24, 2010

DEEPWATER HORIZON Incident



Situation: Saturday 24 July —

Admiral Allen and Administrator Lubchenco Provide an Update on Tropical Depression Bonnie and its Impact on the BP Oil Spill Response

National Incident Commander Admiral Thad Allen and NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco provided a briefing to inform the American public and answer questions on Tropical Depression Bonnie and its impacts on the progress of the administration-wide response to the BP oil spill. Bonnie has since been downgraded to a disorganized area of low pressure. A full transcript is available [here](#).

Administrator Lubchenco discussed Bonnie's expected impact on oil in the Gulf of Mexico. "We do not expect any significant storm surge along the coast. Because Bonnie has weakened, all tropical storm warnings along the Northern Gulf Coast have been discontinued.

"We expect that Bonnie should help dissipate and weather the oil that's at the surface. It will spread the surface slick out and thereby lower oil concentrations. It's expected to break tar patches and tar mass into smaller tar balls which means faster weathering and faster natural biodegradation," she said. "It will also cause more natural dispersion, again lowering the concentration of oil in the water and making it more available to the natural bacteria that are in the water that do this natural biodegradation."

Admiral Allen provided an update on pressure readings of the wellhead. "As of last night at midnight, we had 6,891 pounds per square inch pressure. This was an increase of 14 pounds per square inch over the last 24 hour time period," he said. "So we continue having integrity at the well head. The pressure continues to slowly rise."

Allen also discussed estimated timelines for resuming preparations for the static kill and relief well drilling operations once the equipment is reconnected. "I think probably within 48 hours, they'll be able to start relaying that casing which is the final piece of pipe they have to put into the well bore, and then once that casing is in place, they will put some cement around it to hold it. While that cement is drying, within 48 hours, they will be able to begin the hydrostatic top kill putting the mud down the top of the well," he said.

"It will probably take somewhere between five and seven days for that cement to dry and for them to be in position to be able to actually drill into the well annulus itself. So if you add all that up we're probably looking at somewhere between seven to ten days before we would be able to start the well intercept after the Development Driller III is on scene and has latched up."

NOAA Response

- 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 and seas will be increasing Friday night as Tropical Storm Bonnie moves into the region. Maximum winds by late Saturday are forecast to be 30-40 knots (from the NE then SW). Winds on Sunday-Monday are forecast to be SE from 10-20 knots. Today's overflights and aerial imagery indicate the surface oil is continuing to break up into numerous patches. Trajectories indicate the leading edge to the north will continue to move northwestward into Breton Sound and towards the Chandeleur Islands. Oil moving westward around the Mississippi Delta is collecting in the convergence line associated with the fresh water outflow – this oil will continue moving westward threatening the Delta and shorelines west to Caillou Bay.

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

The new closure announced on July 22 continues to be in effect. NOAA re-opened [26,388 square miles](#) of Gulf waters to commercial and recreational fishing on Thursday. The reopening of a third of the

overall closed area was announced after consultation with FDA and under a re-opening protocol agreed to by NOAA, the FDA, and the Gulf states.

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 23, 2010)

A total of 719 **sea turtles** have been verified from April 30 to July 23 within the designated spill area from the Texas/Louisiana border to Apalachicola, Florida. Seventy-three hatchling turtles were released in Florida from nests that were moved from the northern Gulf of Mexico. There are 209 live sea turtles in rehabilitation centers. These include 166 sea turtles captured as part of the on-water survey and rescue operations, and 43 turtles that stranded alive. A total of 189 stranded or captured turtles have had visible evidence of external oil since verifications began on April 30. These include 172 that are alive and 17 that are dead. All others have not had visible evidence of external oil.

Of the 719 turtles verified from April 30 to July 23, a total of 483 stranded turtles were found dead, 58 stranded alive. Four of those subsequently died. Eleven live stranded turtles were released, and 43 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** 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 no 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 23, 69 stranded **dolphins** have been verified in the designated spill area. Of the 69 strandings, five were live strandings, three of which died shortly after stranding, one was released and one is in rehabilitation. Sixty-three dolphins were found stranded dead. Visible evidence of external oil was confirmed on four dolphins. We are unable at this time to determine whether the three 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. This report contains corrections based on new information. The status of one live dolphin was changed from oiled to unoiled based on further evaluation.

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](#).