

The Ongoing Administration-Wide Response to the Deepwater BP Oil Spill

Prepared by the Joint Information Center

UPDATED May 18, 2010 7 PM

PAST 24 HOURS

The President Urges Congress to Act on Legislation to Enhance Response

President Obama again urged Congress to act quickly on a legislative package that will enable the Deepwater BP Oil Spill response to continue expeditiously, speed assistance to people affected by this spill, and strengthen and update the oil spill liability system to better address catastrophic events.

The President issued the following statement: “I am disappointed that an effort to ensure that oil companies pay fully for disasters they cause has stalled in the United States Senate on a partisan basis. This maneuver threatens to leave taxpayers, rather than the oil companies, on the hook for future disasters like the BP oil spill. I urge the Senate Republicans to stop playing special interest politics and join in a bipartisan effort to protect taxpayers and demand accountability from the oil companies.”

Small Amounts of Oil Reach Proximity of Loop Current

Satellite imagery indicates that the main bulk of the oil is dozens of miles away from the Loop Current, but that a tendril of light oil has been transported within close proximity. NOAA is conducting ongoing aerial observations to determine with certainty whether or not the oil has actually entered the Loop Current, and continues engage experts within and outside government to develop long-term oil movement forecasts.

Both the location of the Loop Current and the oil slick are dynamic—moving around from day to day. The proximity of the tendril of light oil to the Loop Current indicates that oil is increasingly likely to become entrained. In the time it would take for oil to travel to the vicinity of the Loop Current, any oil would be highly weathered and the natural processes of evaporation and dispersion would reduce the oil volume significantly. The oil would also be significantly diminished by ongoing chemical dispersant application.

Fishing Restrictions Extended, Balancing Economic and Public Health Concerns

Out of an abundance of caution, NOAA has extended the boundaries of the closed fishing area in the Gulf of Mexico into the northern portion of the Loop Current as a precautionary measure to ensure that seafood from the Gulf will remain safe for consumers. Though the latest analysis shows that the bulk of the oil remains dozens of miles from the Loop Current, the new boundaries address the possibility that a tendril of light oil has entered or will enter it.

The closed area now represents 45,728 square miles, which is slightly less than 19 percent of Gulf of Mexico federal waters. This leaves more than 81 percent of Gulf federal waters—or nearly 195,000 square miles—still available for fishing. Details can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

The newly closed area is more than 150 miles from the nearest port and primarily in deep water used by pelagic longline fisheries that target highly migratory species, such as tuna and swordfish. Coastal fisheries, such as grouper, snapper and shrimp, will not be affected by the expansion of the closed area.

SBA Continues to Make Low-Interest Loans Available to Affected Small Businesses

SBA Administrator Karen Mills has made available low-interest economic injury assistance loans—and deferring the first payment for 12 months—for small businesses suffering financial losses following the oil spill in coastal regions of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi.

While small businesses are encouraged to file claims with BP, these loans can provide the critical temporary assistance needed to overcome the loss of revenue they are currently experiencing. Additionally, the agency is offering deferral opportunities for small businesses in the affected areas on existing SBA disaster loans, as well as encouraging private lenders who have borrowers in the affected areas with existing SBA-guaranteed loans to consider deferrals.

Loan applications can also be made via SBA's secure web application at www.sba.gov or over the phone at (800) 659-2955.

NASA Continues to Provide Satellite Imagery to Monitor the Oil Slick

NASA scientists and research partners are working closely to provide satellite data to those who need it in the wake of the disaster. One such scientist is Sonia Gallegos, of the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL), who recently spent several days on a boat seeing the effects of the oil spill first hand. This project, which proposes to use NASA's active and passive remote sensing capabilities to monitor oil slicks, was funded by NASA six months ago and got a serious jump start three weeks ago when the Deepwater Horizon BP oil rig caught fire and sunk.

This project is part of a larger effort by NASA's Applied Sciences Program to address coastal management issues in the Gulf of Mexico. NASA's Gulf of Mexico Initiative began in response to the impact of hurricanes Katrina, Dennis, Rita and Wilma in 2005 and overall is intended to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf. NASA is working to achieve these goals through use of expertise in remote sensing, oceanography, coastal processes, signal processing and mathematical modeling.

Controlled Burn Conducted

Favorable weather conditions allowed responders to conduct a successful controlled burn operation for the second consecutive day. As part of a coordinated response that combines tactics deployed above water, below water, offshore, and close to coastal areas, controlled burns efficiently remove oil from the open water in an effort to protect shoreline and wildlife.

Aircraft Conduct Aerial Dispersant Missions

Modular Aerial Spray System (MASS) aircraft flew multiple missions—dispensing the same dispersant chemical being used by BP and the federal responders. These systems are capable of covering up to 250 acres per flight.

Coastal Waters Assessment Team Completes Sampling

NOAA's Mussel Watch replacement team completed sampling throughout coastal Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, and is now focused on collecting oysters, sediments and water at eight remaining sites in Texas. In total, the Mussel Watch pre-oiling sample expedition will have visited 60 sites in the northeastern Gulf region in partnership with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the Louisiana Department of Fish & Wildlife, Louisiana State University, and the MOTE Marine Laboratory.

By the Numbers to Date:

- Personnel were quickly deployed and more than 20,000 are currently responding to protect the shoreline and wildlife.
- More than 950 vessels are responding on site, including skimmers, tugs, barges, and recovery vessels to assist in containment and cleanup efforts—in addition to dozens of aircraft, remotely operated vehicles, and multiple mobile offshore drilling units.
- More than 1.36 million feet of containment boom and 480,000 feet of sorbent boom have been deployed to contain the spill—and approximately 350,000 feet of containment boom and 800,000 feet of sorbent boom are available.
- Approximately 7.6 million gallons of an oil-water mix have been recovered.
- Approximately 640,000 gallons of total dispersant have been deployed—590,000 on the surface and 53,000 subsea. More than 300,000 gallons are available.
- 17 staging areas are in place and ready to protect sensitive shorelines, including: Dauphin Island, Ala., Orange Beach, Ala., Theodore, Ala., Panama City, Fla., Pensacola, Fla., Port St. Joe, Fla., St. Marks, Fla., Amelia, La., Cocodrie, La., Grand Isle, La., Shell Beach, La., Slidell, La., St. Mary, La.; Venice, La., Biloxi, Miss., Pascagoula, Miss., and Pass Christian, Miss.