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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ESTABLISHES OIL IMPACT NOTICE GUIDANCE FOR COUNTIES

TALLAHASSEE – In response to rapidly changing conditions along Florida’s beaches from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) in coordination with Gulf coast impacted counties has established new Oil Impact Notice guidance to provide beach visitors with health information when visiting Florida’s beaches. This replaces earlier guidance developed for issuing and rescinding health advisories along the coastline.

“The Florida Department of Health is committed to providing information to Floridians and visitors that allows them to make appropriate health decisions relating to the health impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill,” said State Surgeon General Ana Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H. “Oil Impact Notices are a valuable resource for the general public to make decisions on whether to avoid entering beach waters, or continue to enjoy above high tide beach activities.”

In May, 2010, FDOH provided county health departments guidance for issuing health advisories, using the visual presence of oil as the trigger for posting an advisory. Advisories were issued in coordination with local emergency management and local officials, and rescinded by local officials when at least two consecutive high tides with no oil sheen, oil slick, oil mousse or a large volume of tar balls were observed in the water from the high water mark, out to at least 100 yards from shore.

On July 2, health officials revised the guidance due to ongoing presence of oil products in Gulf beach waters and because of the way oil has continued to be affected by changes in the tide, current and wind. Impacted counties have encountered instances where oil product was present in the water, but not visible from the beach. At times, surf conditions have been choppy and precluded visualization of any oil products in the water. Therefore, the new guidance for posting Oil Impact Notices has been developed for use by county health departments and partners.

An Oil Impact Notice may stay in place for an extended period of time, and could be removed based on local determination when the beach is no longer impacted by the oil spill.

TIPS

If Florida's residents or visitors see or feel oil products on the beach or in the water – such as an oily feeling on their skin, tar chips/balls that are too numerous to count or are buried in the sand, tar mats, oil mousse or an oil sheen/slick on the water, they are urged to review the Oil Impact Notice that may be posted at the entry of the beach.

Minimize potential negative impacts and:

- Avoid entering areas where oil can be seen or smelled (no wading, swimming or entering the water).
- Avoid direct skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water and sediments.
- Avoid contact with dead or dying fish or other aquatic life.
- Do not swim or ski in areas affected by the oil spill, and if traveling through the area by boat take precautions when hoisting the boat anchor. If oil makes contact with the skin, wash it off with grease cutting liquid dishwashing detergent and water.
- Do not fish in oil spill-affected waters.
- Do not harvest or eat dead fish, fish with oily residue, or fish that have a petroleum odor.
- Avoid boating through oil slicks or sheens.
- Young children, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and individuals with underlying respiratory conditions should avoid the area.
- Prevent pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.

Those near Florida's Gulf Coast may detect an odor because of the oil spill. Some people may be more sensitive to these odors and may experience nasal irritation and feelings of nausea. In combination with seasonal allergies, such as sensitivity to pollen, or pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, some people may experience more severe symptoms.

Individuals experiencing respiratory symptoms that are aggravated by the odors from the oil spill should consider:

- Staying indoors in air-conditioning and avoiding strenuous outdoor activity.
- If symptoms do not improve, contact a primary care physician or other health care provider for medical advice.

Individuals who have pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory illnesses should contact their healthcare professional if feeling symptomatic.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Florida's residents and visitors can learn if their beach has been posted with an Oil Impact Notice by visiting <http://www.myfloridaeh.com/BEACHnames.html> or <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/health.htm#oilimpact>.

In addition, visit www.deepwaterhorizonflorida.com to learn more about Florida's response to the Deepwater Horizon incident, or follow www.Twitter.com/FLDEPalert.

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**Florida Department of Health
Deepwater Horizon
Issuance Oil Impact Notices
Due to Oil-Spill Related Impacts to Water**

Approved May 10, 2010
Revised June 30, 2010 Version 3.6

Purpose: This concept of operations establishes criteria that will be used by County Health Departments to issue oil impact notices due to the Deepwater Horizon incident. The department has adopted the beach water sampling health advisories outlined in F.S. 514.023 as a model for issuance of oil impact notices for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Planning Assumptions

- Coastal water quality is an important issue from public health, environmental, and economic standpoints.
- Coastal water pollution has economic impacts: every day a beach is affected by the oil increases the adverse economic consequences to local communities and tourism.
- Florida beach safety is a shared responsibility across local, state and federal authorities. Multiple entities have authority to regulate Florida beaches or beach water access.
- The Deepwater Horizon Oil spill has impacted Florida beaches.
- Beaches may be impacted at varying levels by the oil spill over time.
- Changes in surf conditions may make oil or oil products difficult to see.
- It may be necessary to issue notices in order to protect the health and safety of Florida residents and visitors.
- The Florida Constitution allows local jurisdictions to restrict beach access or use by exercising its police power if in the interest of the public's health and safety.
- BP has the lead for response and clean-up activities.
- Florida has access to information on the composition of the oil released from the Deepwater Horizon incident.
- County Health Department Directors / Administrators have the authority to issue oil impact notices if the quality of beaches and beach waters fails to meet standards established by the department. For purposes of the Deepwater Horizon incident, the triggers below establish departmental standards.

Authorities

- State Emergency Response Team has authority under F.S. 252 to coordinate state response to disasters.



Concept of Operations

The Florida Department of Health is able to issue oil impact notices urging residents and visitors not to enter waters or public bathing areas that pose health threats. The issuance of oil impact notices associated with this incident should be coordinated with local emergency management and local officials and reported to both the State Watch Office at 1-800-320-0519 and the DOH Division of Environmental Health via email to oilybeaches@doh.state.fl.us.

1. Trigger for issuing and posting an oil impact notice for Florida beaches or other public bathing areas.

The visible presence of an extensive oil sheen, oil slick, oil mousse, or extremely large numbers of tar balls in the water, within 100 yards of the shore, as observed by a designated government professional. This observation need only occur once in order to post the beach as an impacted beach. The physical extent of the impacted beach or public bathing area must be determined and reported.

2. Oil Impact Notice to be posted at beach or at public bathing areas:

It is recommended the oil impact notice signs will be posted at the beach 'access points' from land side and from the water side, based on the local knowledge of where people are swimming and mooring or launching boats.

Oil Impact Notice

This beach has been affected by Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Oil product may be present on the beach and in the water, yet may not be visible due to changing surf conditions.

If oil product is present (extensive oil sheen, oil slick, oil mousse, or extremely large numbers of tar balls in the water) and to avoid potential health impacts, please:

- Avoid wading, swimming or entering the water.
- Avoid contact with oil and oily materials in the water or on the beach.
- Avoid contact with dead or dying fish or other aquatic life.
- Young children, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems should avoid the area.
- If experiencing respiratory problems, leave the area and contact your physician, as you deem necessary.

If oil makes contact with skin, wash it off with grease-cutting liquid dishwashing detergent and water.

For more information contact the County Health Department at xxx-xxxx or County Emergency Management at xxx-xxxx, or the Florida Oil Spill Information Line xxx-xxx-xxxx

3. Trigger for removing an oil impact notice for Florida beaches or public bathing areas.

The oil impact notice may be removed based on local determination that the beach is no longer impacted by the oil spill. Existing notice signage may be replaced by other informational notices based on the condition of the beach.

4. The following conditions warrant further investigation to determine if they are linked to an oil spill or other environmental condition.

- Numerous dead fish or other aquatic life in the water or on the shore.
- Odor complaints in a limited geographic area.

- Reports of sheen or slick on coastal waters, unlikely to be related to this oil spill.
- Poison Control Center calls in a limited geographic area with similar symptoms.

Note: If the investigation of these events reveals that the condition of the beach and adjacent waters related to the oil spill incident requires further decision making, an appropriate course of action will be made at that time.