Bobby Jindal
GOVERNOR

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SECRETARY

State of Louisiana

Department of Health and Hospitals
Office of Public Health

December 18, 2015

Honorable John A. Alario, Jr., President
Louisiana State Senate
P. O. Box 94183
Capitol Station
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9183

Honorable Senator A. G. Crowe
646 Carnation St.
Slidell, LA 70460

Dear President Alario and Senator Crowe,

This letter is in response to Senate Resolution No. 227 for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Office of Public Health (OPH) to study the medium and long term health effects of the British Petroleum oil spill on the health of the residents of Louisiana.

On May 28, 2010, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) received a request for a health hazard evaluation from BP management concerning health effects experienced by workers responding to the BP oil release. The request was prompted by the May 26, 2010 hospitalization of 7 fishermen who were working in BP's Vessels of Opportunity Program in the Gulf of Mexico. Because of the increase in the number of workers who responded to the oil release, the necessity of rapidly establishing a widespread system of surveillance for illness and injuries was a high priority.[1]

In response, the OPH/ Section of Environmental Epidemiology and Toxicology (SEET) established a sentinel surveillance system in Louisiana to track and evaluate reported acute health effects of workers related to the BP Oil Spill. The system captured reports of workers' symptoms and hospitalizations thought to be related to Deepwater Horizon response work. Reports were generated weekly by SEET for 38 weeks after the spill occurred (final report 9/25/2010) and included exposure to odors/fumes, skin contact with contaminated water or objects, and heat stress.

The data was supplied by sentinel surveillance sites such as hospital emergency departments, outpatient clinics, physicians' offices and the Louisiana Poison Center. The data findings are the following: There were 415 reports of health complaints believed to be related to the exposure to the pollutants from the oil spill, including cases of heat stress. Three hundred and twenty-nine reports were from workers and 86 from the general population. Most frequently reported symptoms were headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, weakness/fatigue and upper respiratory irritation. One hundred sixty-nine workers had heat-related complaints. Eighteen workers had short hospitalizations. The general population complaints were primarily related to odors with mostly mild symptoms being reported. These reports were made available to the public and are posted on DHH's website.[2]

In June 2010, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), part of the National Institutes of Health, activated the Gulf Oil study, which is a long-term 10 year follow up health study for individuals who helped with the oil spill cleanup, took training, signed up to work, or were sent to the Gulf to help in some way after the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Almost 33,000 cleanup workers are enrolled in this study, which will help determine if oil spills and exposure to crude oil and dispersants, affect physical and mental health. NIEHS awarded $25.2 million in research grants to Gulf area universities which partner with communities affected by the oil spill. Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, Tulane University, University of Florida, and the University of Texas are the five-year grant recipients evaluating reproduction and birth outcomes, general health and well-being among coastal residents, and seafood safety. Researchers are also analyzing individual and community resilience post-disaster, and determining the impact resilience may have on behavior and mental health of children and adults living in the Gulf region.[3]

In May 2010, EPA directed BP to reduce dispersant usage by 75 percent from peak usage. EPA determined, through assays performed using small shrimp and small fish (inland silverside), that Corexit 9500A was generally no more or less toxic than the other available alternatives. EPA published the results of these tests in a report issued in August 2010 and updated in September 2010, "Comparative Toxicity of Louisiana Sweet Crude Oil (LSC) and Chemically Dispersed LSC to Two Gulf of Mexico Aquatic Test Species (PDF)"[4].

The EPA response, on their "Questions and Answers on Dispersants" website, to the question of whether any human health effects could be expected as a result of using the dispersants is quoted as follows:

> "People working with dispersants are strongly advised to use a half face filter mask or an air-supplied breathing apparatus to protect their noses, throats, and lungs, and they should wear nitrile or PVC gloves, coveralls, boots, and chemical splash goggles to keep dispersants off skin and out of their eyes. CDC provides more information on reducing occupational exposures while working with dispersants during the Gulf Oil Spill Response."[5]

The following page lists some of the key reports and finds and the addresses at which they can be accessed. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 225-342-6188.

Sincerely,

J.T. Lane
Assistant Secretary for Public Health

REFERENCES:

[1]National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Hazard Evaluation Report, August 2011. Accessed 23 July 2015 at http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2010-0115-0129-3138.pdf.

[2]Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Office of Public Health (OPH) Section of Environmental Epidemiology and Toxicology (SEET). Oil Spill Health Effects Summary. Accessed 16 July 2015 at http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/SurveillanceReports/OilSpillHealth/_OilSpillSurveillance2010_17.pdf.

[3] National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). Gulf Oil Response Efforts. Accessed 16 July 2015 at http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/programs/gulfspill/.

[4]United States Environmental Protection Agency. EPA Response to BP Spill in the Gulf of Mexico: EPA's Toxicity Testing of Dispersants. Accessed 16 July 2015 at: http://www.epa.gov/BPSpill/dispersants-testing.html.

[5]United States Environmental Protection Agency. EPA Response to BP Spill in the Gulf of Mexico: Questions and Answers on Dispersants. Accessed 16 July 2015 at: http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/dispersants-qanda.html.