

Oil spill issues Public information: what to do and why

Updated May 5, 2010: Watch for regular updates at www.emergency.louisiana.gov because the situation could change rapidly.

1. Can I eat Louisiana seafood?

Yes. DHH's Environmental Health Program is monitoring seafood to ensure it's safe for consumption. Fishing areas impacted by the spill are closed to fishing and oyster collection. Any seafood available at retailers comes from non-closed waters. Seafood that is deemed unsafe will not be allowed on the market by regulatory agencies.

2. How can I tell if an oyster is contaminated by oil?

If an oyster is contaminated by oil, it will have an oily smell and taste and an oily appearance.

3. If an oyster bed is closed, how long will it stay closed?

The oyster harvesting area will remain closed until sampling comes back equivalent to the baseline samples taken before the oil spill. There is not a predetermined amount time for reopening the beds. To find out about oyster bed closures, go to www.dhhemergencynews.com.

4. Isn't this just an advisory? Can I still harvest oysters for personal use?

No, even though it is precautionary, it is still an official closure. When there is a closure in place, oysters cannot be harvested for any use, personal or commercial.

5. If I'm on the water and I notice the presence of oil, what should I do?

Leave the area and call the DHH Molluscan Shellfish Program's 24 hour hotline at 1-800-256-2775, or the BP 24 hour hotline at 1-866-448-5816.

6. I live near the coast; is my water safe to drink or bathe in?

Yes. The oil spill currently is not expected to affect public drinking water or private well water. The spill is in the Gulf and no drinking water is obtained from this salt water body. If your water becomes unsafe to drink, your water supplier will notify you and advisories will be issued. This would be based on the water failing to meet criteria established by the Environmental Protection Agency or state standards or if there is a waterborne disease emergency. In the highly unlikely event that oil enters the public water supply, the notice will describe any precautions needed, such as seeking alternate sources of water. DHH water teams are monitoring systems across any portion of Louisiana that could potentially be affected by the spill.

7. I can smell the oil. Is that dangerous?

Nothing dangerous has been detected through air monitoring, but many people are very sensitive to fumes, particularly petroleum fumes. Odors can be detected at levels far below the concentrations that may cause health effects. For people who are especially sensitive to odors, some may have a headache or feel nauseated. If you are particularly concerned about these symptoms, consult your medical professional.

8. Can it cause breathing problems?

Some people may be sensitive to any change in the air, which could cause respiratory symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms, stay indoors, ventilate your home with air conditioning and avoid strenuous

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**Anyone with health-related questions regarding the spill can call 211
or their local poison control center at 1 (800) 222-1222.**

outdoor activity. If these symptoms do not improve, contact your doctor or other health care provider for medical advice, especially if you have pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory illness.

9. Do odors mean there are problems with the air?

No. The Environmental Protection Agency has conducted air monitoring at points all along the coast and in the most concentrated area of the spill in the Gulf. Those tests have not registered any dangerous levels of contaminants in the air. If those levels were to rise, state and federal officials will alert residents in the affected areas. EPA continues to post results at www.epa.gov/bpspill.

10. What about swimming and boating?

Advisories are posted near bodies of water, but do not swim, ski or paddle a surfboard in any waters with visible oil. Do not drive your boat through oil slicks or sheens.

11. What if I get oil on myself or my clothing?

Wash off any oil on your skin well with soap and water or cleansers that remove oils and grease.

Do not use solvents or chemicals when washing your skin as these can be more harmful than the oil itself. Prolonged exposure to oil may cause some people to get a skin rash. If you get a rash, see your doctor and tell them how you came into contact with the oil. If you get oil on your clothing, wash in the usual way but separated from other clothing.

12. How should oil contaminated materials that may wash ashore be handled?

Don't burn debris, driftwood or other materials contaminated with oil. You should not gather oil-contaminated debris or dispose of it in the trash; it must be handled separately.

For more information related to the oil spill, visit www.emergency.louisiana.gov. Connect with us on www.facebook.com/GOHSEP and on Twitter at #GOHSEP.

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