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Oil Spill Do's and Don'ts for the Florida Keys: Protecting Yourself and Your Family from the Health Impacts of the Oil Spill

All across the Gulf of Mexico, a catastrophic event is unfolding. Oil from the failed *Deepwater Horizon* rig is spreading throughout the ocean and washing up against Florida's valuable shorelines. The Keys are particularly vulnerable because of the islands' exposure to the sea and the sensitive shoreline and reefs. This fact sheet is designed to give individuals information on what they can do—and what they should not do—to help respond to this disaster.



www.nrdc.org/policy

June 2010

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Oil Spill Do's and Don'ts for the Florida Keys:

Protecting Yourself and Your Family from the Health Impacts of the Oil Spill

As the oil hits our coasts, it is important to recognize that oil is a hazardous material and that we need to protect ourselves against potential health impacts from coming into contact with this substance.

- Oil contains a mixture of heavy metals like mercury, arsenic and lead and various hydrocarbons that can cause skin and breathing irritation, as well as cancer.
- Breathing in oil vapors or sea spray from dispersed oil in wind-blown waves can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and eye and throat irritation.
- Direct skin contact can cause various kinds of rashes, including generalized skin irritation, or something known as “folliculitis” from oil-clogged skin pores.



✓ DO

PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND PETS FROM ANY OILED SHORELINE OR ANIMALS:

- Avoid areas where oil can be seen or smelled. If you see or smell oil, leave the affected area. A list of impacted beaches is available at <http://www.myfloridaeh.com/BEACHnames.html>.
- Avoid any direct skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water and sediments.
- If any oil makes contact with your skin, wash it off immediately with soap and water.
- Do not fish, swim, or engage in water sports in the oil spill-affected waters. State and federal authorities are monitoring conditions and will advise you where these are. If traveling through the area by boat, use rubber gloves when hoisting the anchor.
- If you experience symptoms such as a headache, nausea, dizziness, or throat irritation, leave the area immediately; if the symptoms do not resolve within a few minutes, seek medical attention.
- Anyone who experiences difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, chest pain, or other serious symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

In particular, avoid oiled areas if:

- You have asthma or other respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- You have a compromised immune system.
- You have a hypersensitivity to chemicals, particularly hydrocarbons.
- You are pregnant (some of the chemicals in oil have been linked to miscarriage, preterm birth, and low birth rate).

Children and pets should not come into direct contact with the oil.

If you are experiencing health symptoms, make sure to seek appropriate medical attention. Medical information is also available from the Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222 (<http://www.fpicn.org/>).

❌ DON'T

TAKE MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS:

Oil is a hazardous material and should be handled by trained workers.

- Untrained volunteers should not attempt to clean impacted beaches, shorelines, or wildlife themselves; touching oil or distressed wildlife can cause you and the animals harm.
- If you are not involved in the clean up, you should consider staying away from oil areas, as it will allow workers to finish their jobs faster.

Bear in mind that all oil impacts need to be documented by an official entity or they will not be considered as part of the damages case against BP for the spill. Report oiled areas and wildlife to proper authorities (See following).

✅ DO

WEAR PROTECTIVE GEAR IF YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO HELP WITH CLEAN-UP:

A paper respirator mask and thin latex gloves will not protect you from the oil or dispersant fumes.

If you are in an oil-contaminated zone, you should wear:

- Rubber boots and butyl rubber or nitrile gloves,
- Arm protectors or a full protective suit for skin protection, and
- A respirator if you are in an area where there may be any hazardous vapors.

Workers should not wear their work shoes or boots into their homes and should remove contaminated clothing before entering. Oil-soaked clothing should be discarded in sealed plastic bags and lightly soiled clothing should be washed separately from other clothes. If possible, workers should shower and change clothes before heading home.

✅ DO

REPORT ANY OILED SHORELINE, STRONG ODORS, OR INJURED WILDLIFE:

- For oiled shoreline, call BP's direct line at 1-866-448-5816. Then call Florida's State Warning Point at 1-877-2-SAVE-FL (1-877-272-8335, number only available for calls made in state).
- For oiled or injured wildlife, call the Wildlife Hotline first at 1-866-557-1401. Then contact the Key West Wildlife Center at 1-305-292-1008.
- To report strong odors that may require air monitoring, call the Joint Information Center at 1-713-323-1670.

Again, all oil impacts need to be documented by an official entity or they will not be considered as part of the damages case against BP for the spill.

✅ DO

DO HELP PROTECT THE KEYS!

- Register at <http://www.volunteerflorida.org> or call 1-866-448-5816 to volunteer.
- Sign up at <http://www.KeysSpill.com> to be added to the volunteer list and check in often for new opportunities to help.
- Wear blue and green ribbons reflecting "the blue of the ocean to the green of the Keys" to show the Florida Keys' solidarity.



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✓ DO

CONSIDER DONATING TO THE GULF COAST RECOVERY FUND:

Every dollar donated to the Gulf Coast Recovery Fund goes directly to local Gulf Coast non-profit groups working on the frontlines to help people, wildlife, and fragile ecosystems recover from the disaster. You can donate online at the Gulf Coast Recovery Fund, https://secure.nrdonline.org/site/Donation2?df_id=3440&3440.donation=form1&s_src=nrdchpd.

✓ DO

TELL YOUR U.S. SENATORS TO SUPPORT AND PASS A COMPREHENSIVE CLEAN ENERGY AND CLIMATE BILL:

We need comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation that cuts our dependence on oil, puts a firm limit on global warming pollution and ensures this type of accident doesn't happen again. Please send a letter to your Senators today (https://secure.nrdonline.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1833&s_src=apa&utm_source=nrdcorg&utm_medium=feature&utm_campaign=climatebill).

Additional information is available at the following websites:

- <http://www.simplesteps.org/articles/gulf-coast-oil-spill-health-questions>
- <http://www.KeysSpill.com>
- <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/health.htm>
- <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/site/2931/>
- <http://www.monroecounty-fl.gov/Pages/index>

