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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 Advisories were issued in coordination with local emergency management and local officials, and rescinded by local officials when at least two consecutive high tides with no oil sheen, oil slick, oil mousse or a large volume of tar balls were observed in the water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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