

Beach Closures, Advisories, and Notices Due to the BP Oil Disaster

The Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded on April 20, 2010, killing 11 workers and sparking the worst oil spill in U.S. history. Over the course of two months, approximately 170 million gallons of oil and 200,000 metric tons of methane gas gushed into Gulf waters, affecting approximately 1,000 miles of shoreline.¹ More than a year later, a sorry legacy of enduring damage, people wronged, and a region scarred remains. As of the end of January, 83 miles of shoreline remained heavily or moderately oiled, and tar balls and weathered oil continue to wash ashore.²

As a result, as highlighted in this supplement to NRDC's annual Testing the Waters beachwater quality report, many beaches in the region have issued oil spill advisories, closures, and notices since April of last year. As of June 15, 2011 there have been a total of 9,474 days of oil-related beach notices, advisories, and closures at Gulf Coast beaches since the spill. Louisiana has been hit the hardest, with 3,420 days as of June 15, 2011, in that state, while there were 2,245 days as of June 15, 2011, in Florida, 2,148 days in Mississippi, and 1,661 days in Alabama. State and local officials took these actions in response to oil on beaches and in coastal waters because exposure to this oil can cause a variety of adverse human health effects, including headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, eye, throat or skin irritation, difficulty breathing, and even increased cancer or neurological risks for long-term exposure.

While most of the advisories, closures, and notices that were issued last year due to the oil spill were lifted by the end of the year, cleanup crews are still at work. And the spill is still interfering with trips to the beach as oil continues to wash ashore at Gulf Coast beaches in Alabama, Louisiana, Florida and Mississippi. As of June 15, 2011, four beach segments in Louisiana that have been closed since the spill have yet to open, and three beaches in Florida have remained under oil spill notice.

Besides being a beloved source of recreation for local residents, tourism at these beaches is an important part of the region's economy. In 2004 alone, ocean tourism and recreation contributed approximately \$15.4 billion to the GDP of the five Gulf states (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas),³ so revenue lost from oil spill beach action days could be significant.

Below is a state-by-state look at oil spill notices, advisories, and closures at Gulf Coast beaches from the beginning of the spill through June 15, 2011. Please note that NRDC includes all beaches in its analysis, not just those that are monitored for bacteria. NRDC also includes all advisory, closure, and notice days, not just advisory, closure, and notice days occurring during the regular monitoring season. All days for all lengths of events are included.

The information presented in this supplement was acquired from official government websites, supplemented with phone calls and e-mails with government officials in charge of beach management. For the full list of sources, see Table 1-5: Sources of Information About BP Oil Spill Beach Notices, Advisories, and Closings.

Alabama

Ocean tourism and recreation in Alabama contributed nearly \$355 million to the state GDP in 2004.

The first oil spill-related advisories were issued in Alabama on June 1, 2010, and all advisories were lifted on July 30, 2010. Shoreline Contamination Assessment Teams were working seven days a week on cleanup, and warning signs were still posted at all of Alabama's Gulf Coast beaches into 2011 because of the occasional presence of tar mats and tar balls from the spill. The table below gives oil spill advisory days in 2010. A total of 1,661 advisory days at 30 beaches in Alabama were issued due to the spill in 2010. There have been no oil-related closures since July 2010.

Table 1-1: Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory Days in Alabama in 2010		
County	Beach	Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory Days in 2010
Baldwin	10th Street Access	56
Baldwin	13th Street Access	56
Baldwin	5th Street Access	56
Baldwin	6th Street Access	56
Baldwin	7th Street Access	56
Baldwin	Alabama Point (Gulf of Mexico)	56
Baldwin	Anderson Street	56
Baldwin	Bernard Court	56
Baldwin	Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge	56
Baldwin	Cotton Bayou	56
Baldwin	Florida Point	56
Baldwin	Fort Morgan National Park	56
Baldwin	Fort Morgan Public Beach	56
Baldwin	Gore Road	56
Baldwin	Gulf Shores Public Beach	56
Baldwin	Gulf State Park-Pavilion	56
Baldwin	Little Lagoon Pass Beach	56
Baldwin	Our Road	56
Baldwin	Pelican Point	53
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Annex	56
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Court Lot 35	56
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Court Lot 50	56
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Court Lot 51	56
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Dr Access East	56
Baldwin	Ponce De Leon Dr Public Access	56
Baldwin	Romar Beach	56
Baldwin	South Wilson Blvd	51
Baldwin	Wolf Bay Lodge	51
Mobile	Dauphin Island East End	53
Mobile	Dauphin Island Public Beach	53
Total		1,661

Florida

Ocean tourism and recreation in Florida contributed more than \$10.7 billion to the state GDP in 2004.

The first oil spill-related advisories in Florida were issued on June 8, 2010. Over the July 4, 2010, weekend, Florida ceased issuing health advisories at beaches impacted by the oil spill because they found they were unable to keep up with rapidly changing conditions. Instead, oil impact notices on permanent signs were issued for beaches that had the potential to be impacted by the oil spill. These notices were removed by local health departments when the beach was no longer impacted by the oil spill. Cleanup crews were still at work into 2011 because of the occasional presence of tar mats and tar balls from the spill, and three beaches in Escambia County were still under oil spill notice as of June 15, 2011.

A total of 2,245 advisory and notice days at 30 beaches have been issued due to the spill. This total includes 1,747 days in 2010 and 498 days in 2011, as of June 15.

Table 1-2: Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory and Notice Days in Florida in 2010 and 2011

County	Beach	Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory and Notice Days	
		2010	2011
Escambia	County Park East	47	0
Escambia	County Park West	52	0
Escambia	Fort Pickens	189	166
Escambia	Johnson Beach	187	166
Escambia	Pensacola (Casino) Beach	52	0
Escambia	Perdido Key State Park	194	166
Okaloosa	Beasley State Park	43	0
Okaloosa	Brackin Wayside	43	0
Okaloosa	El Matador	43	0
Okaloosa	Henderson State Park Beach	43	0
Okaloosa	James Lee Park Beach	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #1	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #2	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #3	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #4	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #5	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #6	43	0
Okaloosa	Okaloosa Island Beach Access #7	43	0
Walton	Blue Mountain Beach Access	42	0
Walton	County Park	42	0
Walton	Dune Allen Beach Access	46	0
Walton	Eastern Lake Beach Access	42	0
Walton	Eastern Lake Outfall	42	0
Walton	Grayton Beach Access	42	0
Walton	Holly Street Beach Access	42	0
Walton	Inlet Beach Access (TDC Beach Access)	42	0
Walton	Rosemary Beach	42	0

Table 1-2: Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory and Notice Days in Florida in 2010 and 2011

County	Beach	Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory and Notice Days	
		2010	2011
Walton	Santa Rosa Beach Access	42	0
Walton	South Wall Street Beach	44	0
Walton	Western Lake Outfall	42	0
Total		1,747	498

Louisiana

Ocean tourism and recreation in Louisiana contributed more than \$2.1 billion to the state GDP in 2004.

Louisiana was the first state to be hit by the oil spill, and cleanup crews are still at work. All four segments of Fourchon Beach in Lafourche Parish have been closed since May 7, 2010, and will probably remain closed throughout 2011. The oil spill closures at one section of Grand Isle Beach and all four sections of Grand Isle State Park Beach in Jefferson Parish were not lifted until this year.

A total of 2,232 closing days at 11 beach segments in Louisiana were issued due to the spill in 2010. And as of June 15, 2011, NRDC estimates the total number of closure days in 2011 to be 1,188.

Table 1-3: Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory Days in Louisiana in 2010 and 2011

Parish	Beach	Number of BP Oil Spill Closure Days	
		2010	2011
Jefferson	Grand Isle Beach 1 *	224	15
Jefferson	Grand Isle Beach 2	80	0
Jefferson	Grand Isle Beach 3	80	0
Jefferson	Grand Isle State Park 1	224	140
Jefferson	Grand Isle State Park 2	224	123
Jefferson	Grand Isle State Park 3	224	123
Jefferson	Grand Isle State Park 4	224	123
Lafourche	Fourchon 1	238	166
Lafourche	Fourchon 2	238	166
Lafourche	Fourchon 3	238	166
Lafourche	Fourchon 4	238	166
Total		2,232	1,188

*The date the oil spill closure at this beach segment was lifted has not been confirmed. NRDC was told that it was lifted sometime during January and has applied a date of January 15, 2011.

Mississippi

Ocean tourism and recreation in Mississippi contributed nearly \$210 million to the state GDP in 2004.

The first oil spill-related advisories in Mississippi were issued on June 28, 2010, and all advisories were lifted in early November. Cleanup crews were working along Mississippi's coast into 2011. Mississippi has posted additional signage at all of its beaches educating visitors about what to do if they encounter tar balls and what the health effects of the oil spill may be. The table below gives oil spill advisory days in 2010 (there were no BP oil spill advisory days in Mississippi in 2011). A total of 2,148 advisory days at 17 beaches in Mississippi were issued due to the spill in 2010. There have been no oil-related closures since November 2010.

Table 1-4: Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory Days in Mississippi in 2010		
County	Beach	Number of BP Oil Spill Advisory Days in 2010
Hancock	Buccaneer State Park Beach	120
Hancock	Lakeshore	120
Hancock	Waveland Beach	120
Harrison	Biloxi East Central Beach	128
Harrison	Biloxi West Central Beach	129
Harrison	Courthouse Road Beach	128
Harrison	Edgewater Beach	128
Harrison	Gulfport Central Beach	128
Harrison	Gulfport East Beach	128
Harrison	Gulfport Harbor Beach	128
Harrison	Gulfport West Beach	127
Harrison	Long Beach	127
Harrison	Pass Christian Central Beach	126
Harrison	Pass Christian East Beach	127
Harrison	Pass Christian West Beach	126
Jackson	Gulf Park Estates Beach	129
Jackson	St. Andrews Beach	129
Hancock	Buccaneer State Park Beach	120
Total		2,148

Table 1-5: Sources of Information About BP Oil Spill Beach Notices, Advisories, and Closings

All states
EPA's BEACH Act notification data
In Alabama:
Suzi Rice, Alabama Department of Environmental Management
http://adph.org/news/assets/100601.pdf
http://adph.org/news/assets/100609.pdf
http://adph.org/news/assets/100618.pdf
http://adph.org/news/assets/100730.pdf
http://www.adph.org/news/assets/100504.pdf
http://www.thebeachfacts.com
In Florida:
David Polk, Florida Department of Health
http://www.myfloridaeh.com/061610healthadvisory.pdf
http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/files/healthadvisories/062310_escambia.pdf
In Florida:
http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/files/healthadvisories/062410_okaloosa.pdf
http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/files/healthadvisories/062510_escambia.pdf
http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/files/healthadvisories/062610_escambia.pdf
http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon/files/healthadvisories/070110_escambia.pdf
http://www.doh.state.fl.us/chdWalton/PublicHealth/Oil_Impact_Notice_Rescinded8.13.10.pdf
http://www.escambiahealth.com/recent_hot_topics/2010/pdfs/06_18_ha.pdf
http://www.escambiahealth.com/recent_hot_topics/2010/pdfs/06_28_ha_fishing_pier.pdf
http://www.escambiahealth.com/recent_hot_topics/2010/pdfs/06_30_ha_spill.pdf
http://www.healthyokaloosa.com/Deepwater_Horizon/Media/May05/070210_OilImpactNotices.pdf
http://www.healthyokaloosa.com/Media/2010/061710_HealthAdvisoryRESCINDForOil.pdf
http://www.healthyokaloosa.com/Media/2010/081310_OilImpactNotices_Rescinded.pdf
http://www.southwaltonscene.com/blog/2010/06/the-oil-spill-and-south-walton-health-advisory-issued-june-30-2010.html
http://www.southwaltonscene.com/blog/beaches-of-south-walton/page/2/
http://www.visitflorida.com/florida_travel_advisory/#map
http://www.waltonso.org/NewsMedia/release/2010-192-July-2-Update.pdf
http://www.waltonso.org/press_release/2010_192_July_2_Update.pdf
http://www.healthyokaloosa.com/Media/2010/061710_HealthAdvisoryRESCINDForOil.pdf
In Louisiana:
Eric, Port Fourchon Emergency Preparedness
http://www.crt.state.la.us/parks/
http://www.crt.state.la.us/parks/PressReleases/20110429.pdf
http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/?ID=207
http://www.nola.com/news/gulf-oil-spill/index.ssf/2010/08/2-mile_section_of_grand_isle_b.html
http://www.portfourchon.com/explore.cfm/latestupdates/

Table 1-5: Sources of Information About BP Oil Spill Beach Notices, Advisories, and Closings

Sharon Broussard, Grand Isle State Park
In Mississippi:
Emily Cotton, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/msbeach/hanbmon.cgi
http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/msbeach/jacbmon.cgi

NOTES

- 1 Natural Resources Defense Council: “The BP Oil Disaster at One Year—A Straightforward Assessment of What We Know, What We Don’t, and What Questions Need to be Answered” (April 2011), www.nrdc.org/energy/files/bpoildisasteroneyear.pdf.
- 2 NRDC blog at http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/bdeans/the_bp_oil_disaster_a_one-year.html.
- 3 National Ocean Economics Program, “Coastal and Ocean Economic Summaries of the Coastal States 2009,” <http://www.oceaneconomics.org/NationalReport/>.