

OSHA[®] FactSheet

General Health and Safety Information for the Gulf Oil Spill [August 19, 2010]

OSHA's top priority is to ensure that BP and its contractors perform oil spill response and cleanup operations as safely, effectively and efficiently as possible. This fact sheet provides basic information about common operations, hazards, training and worker protection. If you are unsure or think your work is unsafe, STOP and ASK your supervisor. You can call OSHA at one of its gulf coast Area Offices during normal working hours or at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) or TTY 1-877-889-5627 for further information.

OSHA - Florida Ft. Lauderdale 954-424-0242 Jacksonville 904-232-2895 Tampa 813-626-1177	OSHA - Louisiana Baton Rouge 225-298-5458 OSHA - Mississippi Jackson 601-965-4606 OSHA - Alabama Mobile 251-441-6131	OSHA - Texas Corpus Christi 361-888-3420 Houston North 281-591-2438 Houston South 281-286-0583	BP Hotlines Volunteers: 866-448-5816 Vessels of Opportunity Program (skimming operations): 281-366-5511
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What Are the Operations and Hazards During Shoreline and Vessel Operations?

If you are involved in response and cleanup of weathered oil, you might be:

- Placing or recovering booms
- Skimming and pumping oil (near shore)
- Loading and unloading booms, supplies and people
- Decontamination of boats and booms
- Picking up oil-covered debris
- Conducting other shoreline cleanup operations
- Launching and/or landing boats

Hazards from these operations can include:

- Heat stress – can range from heat exhaustion (headaches, dizziness, weakness, fainting) to heat stroke (hot; may no longer be sweating; confusion). Heat stroke is an emergency and requires immediate medical care.
- Sunburn and sun poisoning
- Contact with “weathered” oil can cause skin and eye irritation or rashes (dermatitis)
- Breathing in chemicals like carbon monoxide from engine exhaust at certain levels can cause dizziness, nose and throat irritation, headache and coughing, or make you feel sick to your stomach
- Cuts, sprains and other injuries
- Drowning
- Being hit by earthmoving or other equipment
- Traffic hazards and car accidents
- Bites from snakes, fire ants and mosquitoes, rodents and alligators
- Lightning and severe weather
- Back injury from lifting and carrying
- Noise
- Exhaustion from long hours and demanding work

Exposure to any of these hazards depends on what you are actually doing and where you are working. For example, heat stress is a real concern for all outdoor activities because the weather is hot and humid. If you are pulling in oil-covered booms, then contact with weathered oil, drowning, and back injuries are also concerns. Most jobs will only involve contact with weathered oil, which no longer has high levels of hazardous chemicals that can get into the air. To make sure, OSHA is monitoring the air that workers breathe for the hazardous chemicals common in oil and dispersants, as well as other chemicals like carbon monoxide. To date, no air sampling by OSHA has detected any hazardous chemical at levels of concern.

Volunteers should be protected as well. For information, call the BP Hotline at 866-448-5816.

What Is Your Employer Required to Do?

1. Train you on the hazards of your job in a language that you understand. You must be trained after being hired and before you begin oil spill response and cleanup work. Training is based on your job duties and the job's hazards. For example, most workers doing shoreline cleanup work need four (4) hours of site training (Module 3, Shoreline Spilled Oil Response). Workers on Vessels of Opportunity (VOOs) need either four (4) or eight (8) hours of site training – those on vessels involved in skimming and working with oiled boom require the higher level of training. Training is being provided by BP approved contractors. Supervisors and several specific jobs require additional hazardous waste operations training, which is not being provided by BP. Training (except for the 40-hour hazardous waste operations training for on-shore cleanup) will be paid for by BP. Training requirements are listed in OSHA's Current Training Requirements for the Gulf Oil Spill (www.osha.gov/oilspills/Basic_Training_Fact_07_02_10.pdf) fact sheet on the OSHA website.

2. Establish safe work practices and give you the personal protective equipment you need to do the job safely. Work practices and protective equipment requirements depend on the hazards of each job. Examples of safe work practices that your employer should use to protect you include:

- Providing rest breaks throughout a work shift to help control heat stress. Providing break and rest areas in the shade. Providing you with water to drink throughout the shift. Training you on the signs of heat illness. Using a buddy system. Providing sunscreen to protect you from sunburn and sun poisoning.
- Training you how to lift loads safely and ensuring that you have the right equipment or enough people to lift heavier loads.
- Having buckets, brushes, water and soap available and providing you with instructions about how to clean oily protective equipment before removing it.

Most jobs will require some type of personal protective equipment. In general, your employer needs to provide protective equipment (free of charge) and must train you on how to use it. They must also replace it if it rips, breaks or wears out. Examples of jobs and personal protective equipment include:

- For jobs that do not involve contact with oil, like picking up clean debris along the shoreline, employers need to give you **work gloves**.
- For jobs involving oil-contaminated debris and those involving contact with oil or other chemicals, employers may need to provide additional protective equipment such as **oil- or chemical-resistant gloves, boots and coveralls**.
- For jobs involving work on vessels, docks or other areas with potential drowning hazards, employers need to provide **life jackets (personal floatation devices)**.
- For jobs on boats involved in burning oil, employers need to provide **escape respirators** and tell you how and when to use it.
- For a few other jobs, OSHA is recommending that workers have access to **respirators** in case they are needed. These jobs include working on boats near the source and pressure washing oily booms and equipment. For these jobs, employers need to have the right respirators for you, make sure you are medically able to wear them, train you how to use them, and tell you to put on the respirator when air tests or other conditions show they are needed.

Your employer must determine the safe work practices and protective equipment that are appropriate for each job. This information must be provided to you during training. More information is available in the OSHA/National Institute for Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) Safety and Health Awareness for Oil Spill Cleanup Workers (www.osha.gov/Publications/Oil_Spill_Booklet_05.11_v4.pdf) and on OSHA's Oil Spill webpage at www.osha.gov/oilspills/index.html.

3. Develop a health and safety site plan and share it with you. The plan must contain information about the job and work site hazards, and spell out the requirements for safe work practices, personal protective equipment, training and emergencies.

What Other Worker Safety Requirements Apply to Oil Spill Response and Cleanup?

Your employer must follow the other requirements in OSHA's Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) standard and the OSHA standards for other hazards, equipment, or operations that might be present at your work site (for example **noise, personal protective equipment and powered industrial trucks**). You can find more information about these requirements in other OSHA fact sheets and on OSHA's website at www.osha.gov.

Worker Rights

You have the right to a safe workplace. The *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970* (OSH Act) was passed to prevent workers from being killed or seriously harmed at work. The law requires that employers provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers. OSHA sets and enforces protective workplace safety and health standards. OSHA also provides information, training and assistance to workers and employers. Workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe that their employer is not following OSHA standards or there are serious hazards. Contact OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) if you have questions or want to file a complaint. We will keep your information confidential. We are here to help you.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

For more complete information:



**Occupational Safety
and Health Administration**
U.S. Department of Labor

www.osha.gov
(800) 321-OSHA