

OIL SPILL BEACH MONITORING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are the beaches safe that were impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil spill?

Some beaches in Northwest Florida will continue to see isolated oil impacts that are influenced by natural tides and varying weather conditions. These impacts will consist mainly of scattered tar balls, but may also be buried oil that may become exposed in the sand along the shoreline.

To Avoid Potential Health Impacts:

- Avoid swimming in or near visible oil or tar balls.
- Avoid touching tar balls that may wash ashore or touching areas of exposed buried oil within the sand.
- If you touch oil product or tar balls, wash the residue from your skin with grease-cutting dishwashing detergent and water. Brief skin contact is not considered a medical emergency, but can result in skin irritation if not removed.
- It is always recommended to avoid contact with dead or dying fish or other ill-appearing aquatic life.

What is the role of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in the current beach monitoring associated with the oil spill? What is Florida Department of Health's role?

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is responsible for collecting samples at beaches and processing those samples. The Florida Department of Health's (DOH) role is to determine when a public health risk exists based upon samples that test positive for any chemicals of concern. When warranted, DOH, via the County Health Department and in partnership with local officials, will advise the public of any necessary precautions.

When does DEP's sampling of panhandle beaches begin and how long will it run?

The DEP began to take samples in February 2011, as part of the long term recovery from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. This monitoring of the beaches is expected to continue through the summer.

Is monitoring for oil part of the Healthy Beaches program?

No, monitoring for oil is separate from the [DOH Healthy Beaches Program](#); however, the public notification system that will be used for this additional monitoring will be the same as the DOH Healthy Beaches Program. The DOH Healthy Beaches program monitors marine beach water weekly for fecal indicator bacteria and posts advisories/alerts the media when necessary.

How were the sampling locations chosen?

As with the Healthy Beaches sampling sites, the monitoring sites are located at readily accessible beaches that have the highest regular number of visitors.

Where can I see a map of the sampling locations?

A map of the beaches that are being monitored is can be found at <http://www.myfloridaeh.com/BEACHnames.html> or http://www.dep.state.fl.us/labs/cgi-bin/beach_health/index.asp.

Why are coastal waters and beach sediments being sampled and monitored for petroleum products?

Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in April 2010, some Northwest Florida waters and beaches were impacted by petroleum products. Coastal waters and beach sediments are being sampled and tested to determine if chemicals that pose a health risk to swimmers and beach visitors are present. If the levels of these chemicals are determined to pose a potential health risk, the Florida Department of Health will issue an advisory to the public.

What is being monitored for at the beaches?

The sampling and analysis of water and sediment (sand) is for chemicals of concern associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. These chemicals, above certain concentrations, are believed to pose a health threat to humans. For detailed information please see [Human Screen Levels](#).

Why were health-based screening levels for petroleum products in coastal waters and beach sediments developed?

The screening levels were developed to be protective of children, short-term visitors and residents. Toxicologists at the Florida Department of Health and the University of Florida developed health protective screening levels for swimmers and beach-goers. The risk-based screening levels represent the chemical concentrations in coastal waters and beach sediments determined to pose little or no significant human health risk. For detailed information please see [Human Screen Levels](#).

If a sample shows a “hit” on a chemical of concern, what will DOH do?

Toxicologists and water specialists will analyze the data to determine if an immediate human health risk exists when a chemical of concern is detected. Recommendations for additional confirmatory samples or expanded sampling will be forwarded to DEP. If chemical levels are determined to pose a significant health risk to visitors, a health advisory will be issued.

Will seafood monitoring be included in the program?

No. For more information on seafood safety please visit <http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/types/seafood/index.html>.