



**Governor's Office of  
Homeland Security &  
Emergency Preparedness**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DHH Reminds Oil Spill Response Workers and  
Volunteers to Take Precautions to Stay Safe**

*Workers Should Always Seek Appropriate Training*

**BATON ROUGE** - The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals is reminding oil spill response workers and volunteers to seek appropriate training and to be cautious when encountering wildlife while assisting the cleanup of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

"Receiving the appropriate training on what gear to wear, and how to stay safe around oil, dispersants and heavy equipment is crucial," DHH Secretary Alan Levine. "The federal government has well-established guidelines for people working in these areas. Those are in place to protect your health and should not be sidestepped."

All clean-up workers and volunteers should receive appropriate training including Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training. For information on how to receive OSHA training, visit <http://www.osha.gov/oilspills/index.html>. Hazards vary depending upon the job being done, but if you are unsure about an activity or operation, stop what you are doing and consult with a supervisor.

Always wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, safety glasses and clothing. Workers should follow their training guidance on proper PPE use.

Onshore workers and clean-up volunteers should be cautious to avoid:

- ? **Exposure to crude oil** - Skin contact may cause irritation. Oil particles in the air may also cause irritation of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. Wash skin thoroughly with soap and water if you get oil on skin.
- ? **Heat stress** - Take frequent breaks and drink plenty of water or sports drinks. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages. Early signs of heat stress include headache, thirst, profuse sweating and muscle aches.
- ? **Slips, trips and falls** - Be careful walking over debris covered in water or oil, especially when carrying anything.
- ? **Trench foot** - Always air dry and elevate your feet whenever possible to avoid trench foot or immersion foot, which occurs when feet are wet for long periods of time.
- ? **Noise** - Always use hearing protection whenever near noisy equipment. If you can't have a normal conversation with someone three feet away or closer, you probably need hearing protection.
- ? **Heavy equipment** - Be alert to all heavy equipment in your surrounding area. Do not walk under or through areas where heavy equipment is lifting objects. Avoid exposure to gasoline or diesel combustion exhaust from powered generators in the clean-up area.

Onshore workers and clean-up volunteers should be cautious around wildlife, including:

- ? **Snakes** - Be alert for snakes that swim in the water or hide under objects or debris. Do not attempt to catch a snake. If a person is bitten, do not attempt to provide medical treatment without a professional. Calm the person down and seek medical attention as quickly as possible.
- ? **Alligators** - Alligators can live in freshwater and brackish environments (between salt and freshwater) and are often difficult to see when below the surface of the water. Take care to avoid them as their crushing bites can be deadly.
- ? **Spiders** - While there are many non-venomous spiders in the salt marshes and grassy marsh areas, Black Widow spiders may be present in the woods. Black Widows can be identified by their shiny black color and the hourglass-shaped mark on their abdomens. The severity of a Black Widow spider bite can vary; seek medical attention if pain and muscle cramping occur. Brown Recluse spiders can also be found in workplaces with dry, secluded areas like under fallen trees, or stationary equipment or indoors in dark storage spaces, shoes or attics. Brown Recluse spiders are brown, with a dark violin-shaped marking on their heads with six eyes rather than the usual eight. Seek immediate medical treatment if a white bite and/or lesion appear.
- ? **Mosquitoes/chiggers** - Use insect repellent that contains DEET or

Picaridin to repel mosquitoes; always follow label instructions carefully to avoid overexposure to repellent.

- ? **Animal bites and rabies** - All bites from terrestrial animals, including skunks, raccoons, foxes, bats, etc., should be considered potential transmissions for rabies and must be reported to public health authorities. Also report bites from stray dogs and cats. Marine animals, reptiles, amphibians and birds do not transmit rabies.
- ? **Venomous marine animals** - Marine fish and invertebrates, such as jellyfish, may cause stings or bites. Workers and volunteers should wear protective footwear and be aware of their surroundings. Stings can appear as rashes or burns. If possible, note the species involved in the sting or bite when seeking immediate medical treatment. Do not attempt to treat a jellyfish sting with urine.
- ? **Poisonous plants** - Always wear gloves and long pants when the possibility of exposure to a poisonous plant exists. Learn to recognize and avoid Poison Oak and Poison Sumac, both prevalent in Louisiana. If exposure occurs, soap and water may help remove some of the oil resin, but clothes, shoes and tools may become contaminated.

If workers or volunteers have questions or concerns about an exposure, animal or plant identification, health effects, or appropriate medical treatment, contact the Louisiana Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

For more information related to the oil spill, visit [www.emergency.louisiana.gov](http://www.emergency.louisiana.gov). Connect with us on [www.facebook.com/GOHSEP](https://www.facebook.com/GOHSEP) and on Twitter as @GOHSEP. View photos from the state's response efforts at [www.flickr.com/photos/lagohsep](https://www.flickr.com/photos/lagohsep).