

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
June 29, 2010**

Contacts: Meghan Scott, FDA, 240-507-0466; Scott Smullen, NOAA, 202-482-6090

NOAA, FDA, and Gulf Coast State Officials Affirm Commitment to Ensuring Safety of Gulf Coast Seafood

Federal and State Agencies Will Use a Joint Protocol for Reopening Closed Waters

New Orleans -- Gulf State health and fisheries officials joined with senior leaders from several federal agencies to affirm a shared commitment to ensuring the safety of seafood coming out of the Gulf of Mexico, through closures of affected waters, surveillance, and with an eye toward reopening closed waters as soon as possible, consistent with public health goals.

Representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) met last week in New Orleans with state health officers and state fisheries directors from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas to coordinate implementation of a joint protocol for sampling and reopening that will apply to both state and federal waters.

Together, they will implement a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-agency program to ensure that seafood from the Gulf of Mexico is safe to eat. This is important not only for consumers who need to know their food is safe to eat, but also for fishermen who need to be able to sell their products with confidence.

“No single agency could adequately ensure the safety of seafood coming from the Gulf following this tragedy, but in working together, we can be sure that tainted waters are closed as appropriate, contaminated seafood is not allowed to make it to market, and that closed waters can be reopened to fishing as soon as is safe,” said Eric Schwaab, Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service.

State and federal authorities reached a critical step toward reopening with their agreement on a shared protocol that will be applied as oil contamination abates in federal and state waters.

State authorities in Louisiana are applying the protocol to consider the possible reopening of two areas and NOAA is applying the protocol to consider the reopening of two closed areas off the coasts of Louisiana and Florida.

“We understand the devastating effects this spill has had on the Gulf states and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with state and federal partners to ensure that these important protocols are implemented efficiently, effectively, and in a way that makes sense for all involved, while maintaining the number one priority we all share – protecting the health of those in the Gulf Coast and across the country,” said Michael Taylor, FDA’s Deputy Commissioner for Foods.

The first and most important preventive step in protecting the public from potentially contaminated seafood is to close fishing and shellfish harvesting areas in the Gulf that have been or are likely to be exposed to oil from the spill.

In addition, NOAA and FDA are monitoring fish caught just outside of closed areas, and testing them for petroleum compounds, to ensure that the closed areas are sufficiently large so as to prevent the harvest of contaminated fish. So far, fish flesh tested from outside the closure areas have tested well below any level of concern for oil-based contamination.

For more information, visit:

NOAA's BP Oil Spill Incident Response

http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/dwh.php?entry_id=809

FDA's Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Update

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ucm210970.htm>

Official Statement of Acceptance of Protocol

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ucm217600.htm>

Summary of the Reopening Protocol

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ucm217598.htm>

#