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State Surgeon General

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Public should avoid oil and tar on beaches

- Remember that tar may be buried in sand -

PENSACOLA – Because oil and tar in Escambia’s gulf front beaches will shift with every tide, current, and wind change, the public may see oil and tar at the beach whether or not the area has yet been placed under a health advisory. The public should continue to avoid contact with oil and tar, as detailed below, in order to minimize potential health impacts. In addition, residents should continue to report oil/tar to 1-877-389-8932 or #DEP from a cell phone.

To minimize potential health impacts, individuals should:

- Avoid direct skin contact with oil, oil-contaminated water, oil products and sediments.
 - ⇒ Avoid wading, swimming, or entering the water where there is oil or oil product (such as tar chips/balls that are too numerous to count, tar mats, oil mousse, oil sheen, or oil slick).
 - ⇒ Remember that tar may be buried beneath the sand – use care when digging in the sand.
 - ⇒ Steps for removing tar from the skin are listed at the end of this news release.
- Do not swim or ski in areas affected by the oil spill, and if traveling through the area by boat, take precautions when hoisting the boat anchor. If oil makes contact with the skin, wash it off with grease-cutting liquid dishwashing detergent and water.
- Do not fish in oil spill-affected waters.
- Do not harvest or eat dead fish, fish with oily residue, or fish that have a petroleum odor.
- Avoid boating through oil slicks or sheens.
- Young children, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems, and individuals with underlying respiratory conditions should avoid oil contaminated areas.
- Prevent pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.
- Those near Florida's Gulf Coast may detect an odor because of the oil spill. Some people are more sensitive to these odors and may experience nasal irritation and



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feelings of nausea. In combination with seasonal allergies, such as sensitivity to pollen, or pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, some people may experience more severe symptoms.

- Individuals experiencing respiratory symptoms that are aggravated by the odors from the oil spill should consider.
 - Staying indoors in air-conditioning and avoiding strenuous outdoor activity.
 - If symptoms do not improve, contact a primary care physician or other health care professional for medical advice.
 - Individuals who have pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory illnesses should contact their physician if feeling symptomatic.

Some are Sensitive to Chemicals

For most people, occasional brief contact with a small amount of oil, while not recommended, will do no harm. However, some people are sensitive to chemicals, including chemicals found in the crude oil and petroleum products. Those people may experience skin or eye irritation with even brief contact with oil.

Removing Tar from Skin

Individuals should avoid contact with tar balls. However, if an individual's skin comes into contact with tar:

1. Wash with grease-cutting liquid dishwashing detergent and large amounts of water. Health officials discourage the use of gasoline, kerosene or other solvents to clean oil from skin.
2. If tar is not removed with grease-cutting liquid dishwashing detergent, scrape off the excess tar from your skin, apply another grease removing agent, such as mineral oil, and rinse your skin with large amounts of fresh water.
3. Remove contaminated clothing.
4. If symptoms or irritation occur, call a physician.

For More Information

- Escambia County Health Department at (850) 595-6700 and www.EscambiaHealth.com
- Escambia County Citizen's Information Line at 471-6600 from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CDT (Monday – Sunday) or www.EscambiaDisasterResponse.com
- Florida Oil Spill Information Line at (888) 337-3569

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