

**Beaches of South Walton – Frequently Asked Questions
Gulf Coast Oil Situation
June 17, 2010**

OPERATIONAL

What steps have been taken to prepare for potential oil impacts?

Walton County officials have taken steps to protect our critically important coastal dune lakes, including draining lake levels and installing sand berms (sand barriers) to maintain separation between these lakes and Gulf waters. The County is preparing to activate the next level of the coastal protection plan.

Should we be doing more?

While the situation can be frustrating, every action we take must follow some very strict state and federal guidelines. If we don't, Walton County faces substantial fines, losing our funding from BP to reimburse our protection efforts and liability issues. However, the Sheriff has directly stated "inactivity is unacceptable."

What is the next step of the county's preparedness action plan?

Over the next 24-72 hours, residents and visitors can expect to see activities taking place on the beaches, and along the coast. This plan will be implemented in stages in response to the current situation and levels of impact.

What is the county doing off shore?

Phase I of the plan takes place offshore. Spotters in the air and water are being utilized to direct vessels of opportunity to deploy absorbent materials in the water to soak up oil, which will then be off loaded onto pre-positioned barges carrying lined containers. They will then transport the oil soaked material to be disposed of properly.

What is the county doing on the Beach?

The county is preparing to ensure there is a continuous sand berm along the beach, which will provide an added level of protection and oil containment. It will help contain the oil to the lower level of the beach, mitigating upland impacts.

How is the County deciding where berms are built?

Berms will only be constructed in areas that do not have natural berms and will mimic the natural contour of the beach. Areas of the beach that need recontouring will be identified at the time of construction. At time of completion, a continuous berm, either constructed or natural, will provide an enhanced level of protection to upland beach areas and make containment and cleaning easier. There is no need to scrape sand to the toe of the dune because the berm plan will protect the upland sand from impacts.

How will you build the berm?

The berm will be located on the ridge of the beach. Construction will move the dry sand landward of the ridge and build a one and half foot berm.

Will the beach be closed during this process?

No. beaches will remain open. However, there will be limited access within the construction area for safety reasons.

Where and when will this project begin?

The project could start as early as Friday (6-18) and will most likely begin at the west end of Walton County. Construction will be completed along the 26 miles coastline in three to four days.

Are there other plans to protect the beaches?

Yes. In addition to removing the oil from the water, and protection of the beach through the use of berms, if impacts become more imminent then silt fencing, geofabrics and geo-tubes may be employed.

What is silt fencing?

Silt fencing is a temporary sediment control device traditionally used on construction sites to protect water quality in nearby waterways. Due to its absorption qualities it will help collect oil that comes up on beach before it gets to the berm. It will be the first line of defense on the beach.

What is geofabric?

Geofabric is a permeable fabric which when used in association with sand has the ability to separate, filter, reinforce, protect, or drain. It is typically made from polypropylene or polyester.

If we receive impacts, what is the response time for clean up?

BP contracts SWS Eagle, which is the only approved contractor to clean oil. BP has assured the County that there will be rapid response. Walton County is also looking to obtain an approved back up contractor to support the efforts if impacts become prevalent.

It is important to note that there is a clear process through BP and DEP for removal. **It is not permitted for any business or individual to conduct clean up efforts.** If oil is spotted, please call 850-267-2000 and 1-866-448-5816.

Can I hire a contractor to build a berm on my beach?

Before any individual or business takes action on their own, they must contact DEP to discuss options and obtain authorization. Contact: DEP Bureau Chief Mike Barnett (850) 488-7708. The county's plans include a continuous berm along the coastline.

Can I hire my own contractor to clean my portion of beach?

Clean up and recovery must be done through the BP contractor, SWS Eagle. SWS Eagle is here on site and prepared to mobilize when necessary.

What is the plan for the inland waterways and Choctawhatchee Bay?

There is a plan that includes booms, barriers and silt fencing to protect our inland waterways.

Can we help clean up oil?

Oil is a hazardous substance. **DO NOT handle or clean any type of oil from the beach.** Crude oil, like motor oil, MUST be disposed of properly. Call 850-267-2000 or 1-866-448-5816 immediately.

If Beaches of South Walton begins receiving impacts, will the beaches be closed?

If beach impacts are substantial, the County may be required to temporarily restrict access to a section of beach while it is cleaned. Once the beach is cleaned, it will be reopened.

Is the water safe for swimming?

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is testing water quality daily. The Walton County Health Department is reviewing these water sample tests and may issue a Health Advisory if conditions become unsafe. The health and safety of our residents and visitors is a top priority and we are committed to keeping visitors and residents informed.

Should we be concerned about air quality, especially those who suffer from asthma?

The EPA is testing air quality daily. As of now, air quality is better than some of cities from which our visitors come. If air quality were to be reported as poor, information will be posted on bswupdate.com and guests/future visitors will be informed.

What are the dark patches I see in the water?

In some cases, it may be June Grass, seasonal seaweed that appears every year in June. It is a sign of healthy beaches and is a natural fertilizer for the sea oates.

Are local, state and federal agencies coordinating efforts?

The TDC, sheriff's office and County leaders are in constant communication with the Florida DEP, and have secured more teams on the ground to manage response efforts.

MARKETING

How do I answer queries about the status of our beaches?

The status of our beaches is updated twice daily on www.bswupdate.com

Can I direct visitors to a web cam?

The bswupdate.com site offers several web cams; links are located under the "Beach Views" tab.

Is there a universal cancellation policy or recommended cancellation language?

While the TDC has provided recommendations regarding a universal cancellation policy, which offered guests a 24-hour cancellation policy and full refund if the beaches were to closed due to oil impacts. Due the diversity of our lodging partners, we are unable to market a program of this kind. We are using the following language instead:

"We want you to feel confident about choosing the Beaches of South Walton as your vacation destination. In an effort to reassure our customers, many local accommodations are relaxing their cancellation and refund policies to protect your vacation. Please visit our [accommodations section](#) and contact individual businesses to find out information about their policies"

What do I tell visitors who want to know if they should cancel their reservation?

It is an individual decision. We can not speculate on the types of impacts Walton County may receive. There are many other fun activities within our 15 beach communities, four state parks, Point Washington State forest, the Bay and coastal dune lakes as well as attractions in Panama City Beach and Destin that will also be open for enjoyment.

Is the region uniting to overcome the economic impacts of the oil spill?

In addition, there is currently forming a region economy recovery coalition comprised of the seven TDC/CVBs along the Florida Gulf Coast. Efforts are also being coordinated through the Governor's Economic Recovery Task Force, VISIT Florida, and the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association.

If impacts become prevalent how will our marketing message change?

If impacts were to become prevalent, our message will become: "Our communities are open for enjoyment." Our web site and bswupdate.com will advise visitors as to our "Beach Status" and strongly promote our beyond the beach events and activities. In promoting bookings, language will change from "Book your worry free vacation" to "Book your vacation experience today."

What should I tell visitors who say they want to help?

Tell them to "keep traveling." The region needs their support and there are many great experiences to still be had along the coast.

Are there volunteer opportunities for our guests/groups?

Oil can only be cleaned by trained professionals. Guests may take the 8 hour training class to conduct level one clean up/recovery activities. Guests can more easily get involved by participating in coastal clean up. Cleaning debris and trash from the beaches will minimize potential impacts.

What is the TDC doing to encourage visitation and reservations?

The TDC is implementing an aggressive marketing and public relations campaign, which includes media relations, out-of-market media blitz in our top feeder and Southwest Airlines markets, bringing media personalities in-market to broadcast live, social media, testimonials, internet marketing/banner ads, enewsletter blasts, and use of celebrity spokespersons. In addition, the plan includes television and radio spots made possible through a grant through BP in which \$1.35 million was allocated by the Governor to Beaches of South Walton.

ADMINISTRATIVE

How do I file a BP claim?

- Call 800-440-0858
- A BP representative will ask a few basic questions
- (Name, address, phone, approx. loss incurred, etc.)
- A BP representative will then call you back with a claim number and make an appointment to go to the local claim office (on Hwy 98) to file the claim.
- You will be asked to bring information such as – 2 years tax returns, 2 years sales tax records, 2 years payroll, monthly profit and loss and any cancelled contracts.

- If a person cancels a contract or rental agreement makes sure you gets the reason in some form of writing specifying the reason for the cancellation.
- BP will refund all deposits that have to be refunded. (Don't hurt yourself this year for next year's business.

What should I do if I see oil on the beach?

DO NOT touch or try to remove. Please contact our Walton County Sheriff's Office at 850-267-2000 and 1-866-448-5816.

How do beachgoers remove oil from their feet or hands?

Baby oil or Dawn dish soap are two over the counter products that quickly remove oil or tar from the skin.

What if I see oil soaked wildlife?

Do not handle oiled birds or other marine life. Please call 850-267-2000 to be placed in touch with the proper wildlife management authorities.