

National Weather Service Serves Vital Role in Oil Spill Operations



NOAA emergency response meteorologist Tim Erickson at the Deepwater Horizon oil spill Incident Command Post in Houma, La., to serve as the on-site emergency response meteorologist to support the government's oil response effort.

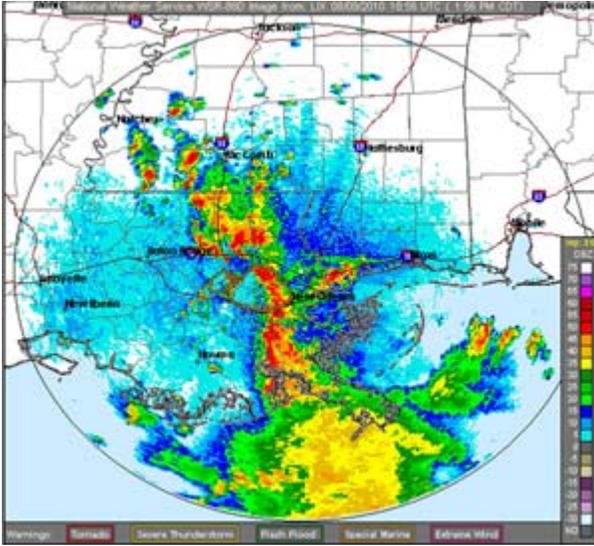
[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

Since the very first day of the Deepwater Horizon/BP catastrophe, [NOAA's National Weather Service](#) forecasters have played a major role protecting the safety of everyone working to mitigate and clean up the oil spilling into the Gulf of Mexico. And with the hurricane season heating up, their work today is more critical than ever.

An Immediate Response to a Life Threatening Situation

"It was actually the day of the explosion that we were contacted by the Coast Guard to get going. The explosion occurred on April 20 and we were already providing weather support by nine o'clock in the morning on the 21st," said Ken Graham, meteorologist-in-charge of the [National Weather Service forecast office in Slidell, La.](#) "One of the first and key things they wanted was a two-day spot forecast from the spill site – and we are still providing these forecasts today."

In short order, two incident command centers were established in Houma, La., and Mobile, Ala., where representatives from British Petroleum and local, state and federal agencies were briefed daily with up-to-the-minute weather data – enabling them to make "go - no go" decisions for marine and airborne operations.



Sample weather radar image from the Slidell, La., forecast office.

High resolution (Credit: NOAA)

While the forecast offices in Slidell and Mobile serve as point positions, they are supported by a team of meteorologists on location and from afar at various coastal and inland NWS offices, including those throughout the Southern, Eastern, Central and Western regions.

“The support has been absolutely outstanding,” said David McShane, meteorologist-in-charge of the Mobile forecast office. “It is heartening to see that we have forecasters here from all over the country. They fit in wonderfully and have been very well received.”

Graham notes that the agency’s safety concerns are not limited to those working in the Gulf, but also for the volunteers doing onshore clean up in the summer heat.

Protecting the Lives of Volunteers & Staff

“We work closely with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration providing heat advisories. OSHA determines how long responders can work in their protective suits based on the heat index and other parameters. We have people from cooler climates as far away as Canada, Seattle and Portland helping with the cleanup efforts and it’s vitally important we not only keep the responders safe from severe weather and high seas, we must communicate any life threatening parameters – including heat.”



Workers replacing oiled pom-poms with clean ones along a beach in Louisiana.

[High resolution](#) (Credit: NOAA)

For the thousands of people working the Deepwater Horizon/BP event in the air, on land and at sea, the National Weather Service's primary, overriding concern is safety.

"The objective here is to provide weather information that is accurate and timely so we can eliminate many of the risks to their safety and well being," said McShane. "Basically – it's our core mission to protect life."

Visit the [National Weather Service's Deepwater Horizon Decision Support Page](#) to get the latest weather updates affecting the Deepwater Horizon/BP incident.

Learn about [NOAA's response to the Deepwater Horizon/BP event](#) online. 🌐