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ValueOptions® Expert: Gulf Coast Residents Face “Anticipatory Anxiety”

Although Gulf Coast residents are dealing with one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history, they are also facing traumatic stress with few precedents, said Dr. Hal Levine, chief medical officer of ValueOptions® Inc.

Two months after the oil spill began, residents of the states touching the Gulf of Mexico continue to deal with “anticipatory anxiety,” Levine said. Though this is the same anxiety that coastal residents might have as a hurricane approaches, the duration of the oil well leak and the uncertainty of when it might stop makes it almost incomparable. “The effects of chronic stress are enormous when it goes on this long,” Levine said.

What to expect

Residents could be experiencing difficulty sleeping, loss of concentration, inability to control their emotions and compromised immune systems that lead to colds, flu or exhaustion.

“This isn’t like a broken leg,” Levine said. “This is more like a chronic, debilitating disease. It’s something you have to live with and deal with every day.”

With the ongoing national media coverage, many who are not directly impacted in terms of their livelihood or their community’s safety still have very strong feelings about this event.

Actions to take

Profound sadness, grief and anger can be normal reactions to an abnormal event such as this oil spill. Talking with others—whether to a trusted friend or loved one or to a mental health professional—can help ease intense feelings.

People who work toward difficult but practical solutions—such as exploring a new job or place to live—will be better off emotionally than those who do nothing, Levine said. “People who just sit around and wait for others to do something will be hit the hardest,” he said.

Even if you don’t know anyone who is directly affected by this tragedy, you still might find it helpful to talk about the events with friends, family, co-workers, or a therapist.

Continue to promote your physical and emotional health by staying active in your daily life patterns. Be sure to incorporate healthy eating, rest and exercise into each day. And consider minimizing your exposure to the media coverage.

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What to Expect from the Oil Spill and How to Protect Your Health

People can be exposed to hazardous substances related to the spill by breathing them (air), by swallowing them (food, water), or by touching them (skin). People should avoid close contact to the spill and fumes from any burning oil.

Air quality

- **Smell:** People may be able to smell the oil spill from the shore. The odor comes from chemicals in the oil that people can smell at levels well below those that would make most people sick. However, exposure to low levels of these chemicals may cause irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. People with asthma or other lung diseases may be more sensitive to these effects.
- **Burning oil:** When responders burn some of the oil, some "Particulate Matter" (PM) may reach the shore. PM is a mix of very small particles and liquid droplets found in the air. PM may pose a greater risk for people who have a chronic condition such as asthma or heart disease.

If you smell gas or see smoke or know that fires are nearby, stay indoors, set your air conditioner to reuse indoor air, and avoid physical activities that put extra demands on your lungs and heart.

From the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Accessed 6/9/10: <http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/index.html> accessed on 6/9/10. Please visit that page for updated information, or use the links below.

Odors from the BP oil spill

- Some residents along the coast report smelling odors, and experiencing eye, nose, or throat irritation, nausea, or headaches.
- EPA and CDC are concerned about the odors and any health effects from the pollutants causing the odors. We have been particularly concerned about pollutants that could reach shore from the burning of oil and pollutants that may evaporate from the spill as it spreads closer to shore, potentially affecting residents along the shoreline.
- Since late April, EPA has been monitoring the air at multiple sites along the Gulf Coast for certain pollutants that are associated with petroleum products and from the burning oil out at sea. EPA's air monitoring to date, has found that air quality levels for ozone and particulates are normal on the Gulf coastline for this time of year and odor-causing pollutants associated with petroleum products are being found at low levels.
- The levels of some of the pollutants that have been reported to date may cause temporary eye, nose, or throat irritation, nausea, or headaches, but are not thought to be high enough to cause long-term harm. These effects should go away when levels go down or when a person leaves the area. The low levels that have been found are not expected to cause long term harm. We will continue to monitor the air and if we begin to detect levels that are higher we will provide updates to the public. For up-to-date information on air quality and monitoring data please see www.epa.gov/bpspill/air.html.

Some of the odors and chemicals that are being identified in the area are as follows:

- "Rotten egg" odor: you may be smelling hydrogen sulfide (H₂S).
- The levels of H₂S that have been reported to date may cause irritation, but as stated above, these effects should go away when H₂S levels go down, or when a person leaves the area.
- While H₂S is associated with oil and natural gas extraction, it also comes from marshes and sewage treatment plants. We do not know the exact source of H₂S in these areas.

- “Gas Station-Like” Odor: this may be caused by volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. The key toxic VOCs in most oils are benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene.
- Exposure to low levels of VOCs may cause temporary irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. It is possible that people with asthma may be more sensitive to the effect of inhaled VOCs. The VOC smell may give you a headache or upset stomach but is not expected to cause long term health effects. If you are sensitive to VOCs, you should stay indoors to limit your exposure, close windows and doors, and set your air conditioner to a recirculation mode. The smell may become stronger if the wind or weather changes.
- Historical data on oil spills indicate that VOCs are likely to evaporate, disperse and/or react quickly after the oil reaches the surface of the water.
- Currently, we are measuring very low levels of VOCs. We will continue to monitor the air and if we begin to detect VOC levels that may be harmful we will provide updates to the public. For up-to-date information on air quality please see www.epa.gov/bpspill/air.html.
- “Oily” or “Tar-Like” smell: Information we have obtained to date indicates that there are chemicals remaining in the weathered oil known as semi-volatile organic compounds (or SVOCs), and they are primarily responsible for the “oily odors.”

EPA is monitoring for VOCs onshore to quantify the amounts of SVOCs in the air to determine if any might be present at unsafe levels. These data are posted at www.epa.gov/bpspill/air.html.

Food

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are monitoring the oil spill and its potential impact on the safety of seafood harvested from the area. Although crude oil has the potential to taint seafood with flavors and odors caused by exposure to hydrocarbon chemicals, the public should not be concerned about the safety of seafood in the stores at this time. For more information about seafood and the oil spill, visit <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ucm210436.htm>.

Water

Drinking water and household water are not expected to be affected by the spill. However, water used for recreation may be affected. Swimming in water contaminated with chemicals from the oil spill could cause health effects. For more information about water and the oil spill, visit http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/oil_spill/information_residents.htm#5.

Follow local and state public health guidelines and warnings about the use of beaches and coastal water for swimming, boating, and fishing. For more information about beach safety, visit <http://www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com/go/doc/2931/542551/>.

Dispersants

Oil spill dispersants break an oil slick into small drops. For most people, brief contact with a small amount of oil spill dispersants will do no harm. However, longer contact can cause a rash and dry skin. Dispersants can also irritate your eyes. Breathing or swallowing dispersants can also cause health effects.

If you are concerned that you have been exposed to oil or dispersants, see your doctor. Health care providers can find more information on CDC’s oil spill website at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010>.

Protect yourself from oil-contaminated water (EPA)

Here are some simple steps you can take to protect yourself from contaminated water along the Gulf Coast:

- Pay attention to local authorities and avoid areas affected by the oil spill. The oil could cause health problems, including skin and eye irritation or breathing problems.
- Keep your pets from entering oil-contaminated areas.
- If you get contaminated water on your skin, wash it off immediately with soap and water or a hand cleanser meant to remove oils and grease.
- If you accidentally drink some oil-contaminated seawater and symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or dizziness occur, seek medical attention.

Those Working With Dispersants

People working with dispersants are strongly advised to use a half face filter mask or an air-supplied breathing apparatus to protect their noses, throats, and lungs, and they should wear nitrile or PVC gloves, coveralls, boots, and chemical splash goggles to keep dispersants off skin and out of their eyes. CDC provides more information on reducing occupational exposures while working with dispersants during the Gulf Oil Spill Response.

Beach Conditions in Your Area

For more information on conditions of beaches in your area, visit: [Beaches Where You Live](#) or [More about beaches](#).

For More Information or Questions:

- For questions about the response, call the Joint Information Center: 1-985-902-5231 or 1-985-902-5240
- For oil spill health related questions, call the Medical Support Line: 1-888-623-0287
- [Sign Up for Deepwater Horizon Response Text Message Alerts](#)

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010/what_to_expect.asp. Please visit this page for updated information.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill

What is in the oil that could be harmful?

The oil spill may contain two types of oil: diesel fuel and crude oil. Crude oil likely makes up the largest part of the spill because it would have come from the well about 5,000 feet below the surface.

Both diesel and crude oil are mixtures of different hydrogen and carbon-based chemicals normally called hydrocarbons. Because they are mixtures, different oils can be harmful in different ways.

Diesel is harder to burn than everyday gasoline and lasts longer in the environment when it is spilled. The diesel, if released from the drilling rig, enters the air slowly and can be detected by smell even when only small amounts of diesel are in the air.

The crude oil involved in this oil spill is what is called medium sweet crude.

The “sweet” means it contains less sulfur compounds, which means it is less toxic. Medium crude usually contains fewer chemicals that enter the air as easily as some other oil types. Medium crude also tends to contain fewer chemicals that pose a threat over long periods of time in contrast to other oil types.

Based on data from oil recovered from other wells in this area, we expect that the more hazardous substances found in crude oil, benzene and sulfides, will make up less than 1 percent of this oil spill.

What is in the air?

Over time, many of the compounds that make up these oil mixtures will enter the air. The wind will then spread out these vapors over a distance, lowering their concentration in any one area.

When these vapors reach the coast, you will probably be able to smell them. Based on what we know about these chemicals and our previous experiences with oil spills, we expect the level of vapors in the air will be below the level that can hurt you. Tests of the air can tell us more.

Strong smells affect different people in different ways. Some people may experience nausea, vomiting or headaches. Leaving the area affected by the smell should help to stop your symptoms, if the smell is causing them. If you have to be outside, a respirator with an odor control feature may provide some relief from the smell. Based on what we know now, you do not need to use a respirator for your safety, but using one may make you more comfortable. Most hardware stores stock NIOSH certified N95 respirators with odor control or charcoal filter layers; check the label to make sure the mask is an N95 respirator with odor control or an N95 with a charcoal layer. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully to be sure you are using the mask properly.

For now, if the smell bothers you, stay indoors, close the doors and windows, and turn on your central air conditioning. If you have a window air conditioner, instead of a central unit, it may be better not to use the air conditioner or to turn the settings to the recirculating mode, which closes the outside ventilation feature.

What will be coming ashore with the oil?

It will take time for the oil to reach the shore. During this time, we are working to break up the oil using other chemicals, so that less of it makes it to shore. This oil is usually a greater hazard for wildlife than humans. You will hear more about the harm for wildlife as the cleanup continues.

Any chemicals from the oil that do reach the shore may still have an odor and look a bit like asphalt or road tar. It is important to stay away from any oil that reaches shore because coming into close contact with the oil for long periods of time can be hazardous. Avoid touching any of the oil you find.

If some of the oil gets on your bare skin, wash it off as soon as you can. If you develop a rash, see your doctor or other health care provider. Tell them how you came to touch the oil, and then have your provider contact the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Can the oil harm my children?

Children tend to be more sensitive than adults to oil and other forms of pollution. What might be annoying to you could be a real problem for them, particularly if your child is an infant or toddler, or has a pre-existing condition.

Like adults, children should avoid contact with the oil. If some of the oil gets on your children's bare skin, wash it off as soon as you can. Watch your children carefully for rashes or dark, sticky spots on their skin that are hard to wash off. If you see any of these symptoms, see your doctor or other health care provider.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about the spill and the progress of the cleanup, go to www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com.

For more information about potential hazards associated with oil and petroleum products, go to <http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010/>.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/oil_spill/faq.htm.

Shore Up Your Resilience to Manage Distress Caused by the Oil Disaster in the Gulf

The Gulf of Mexico is experiencing a man-made disaster caused by a leak from a destroyed offshore oil rig. The situation has been described by President Obama as a “massive and potentially unprecedented environmental disaster.” Reports indicated that as many as 210,000 gallons of crude oil a day are pouring in to the Gulf with no ready solution. This disaster will affect wildlife, the area’s fishing and recreation industries, and the health of oceans and shorelines. Watching the disaster unfold, whether in proximity to the disaster or on your television or computer, can be distressing. In addition, the situation can feel helpless because it is growing worse and there is little most people can do to stop it.

There are simple and effective ways to address the distress or anxiety you may be experiencing. Many are essential ingredients for a healthy lifestyle and adopting them can help improve your overall emotional and physical well-being.

- **Get the facts**—Stay informed about the extent of the oil spread and how it is affecting the area. What are the likely consequences if oil continues to spill for several more months? Knowing the facts can lessen anxiety that comes from uncertainty and enable you to feel more in control about an otherwise chaotic situation. The facts can also prevent you from worrying about issues you cannot control or that are not a cause for concern.
- **Have a plan**—If you are directly affected by the oil spill, identify steps you can take in the event of loss of livelihood, destruction of property or other outcomes. Consult with peers and close friends or relatives to explore ideas for persevering through possible hardship. Having a thought-out plan with specific action steps can make the situation more manageable.
- **Make connections**—Reach out to connect with close family members and friends. These relationships can be a source of strength. Coming together and helping one another can be positive for your emotional health. Children will have questions and worries about the oil disaster, especially in the communities most affected. Keep in mind that children learn resilience skills from the adults in their lives. Encourage activities and open communication to enable them to better cope day by day. Psychological research shows that “social support”—caring and supportive relationships—are essential for building resilience and happiness.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook**—Know that scientists, environmentalists, biologists and other experts are working to develop a viable solution to this problem. Companies and government agencies are already using equipment and expertise to limit the oil’s spread and damage. Disasters are inevitable, but not insurmountable. Identify ways you’ve successfully managed past hardships and draw upon these skills and experiences to help you through the current situation.
- **Volunteer**—Lighten your burden by contributing your energy and talent to a cause you feel passionate about—whether it is the environment, ocean wildlife, fishing communities or other causes. For example, in past oil spills, animal rescue organizations helped to clean animals covered in oil and return them to their natural habitats. Supporting or helping one of these organizations may be a way to make a difference in the current crisis.

Source: American Psychological Association, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/oil-disaster.aspx>

The Gulf Oil Disaster: Developing a Positive Outlook in the Face of Tragedy

The oil catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico is creating an array of devastation. The Gulf's ecological system is being inundated with crude oil and dispersants. People who live and work in the Gulf area or who are aiding with the cleanup are experiencing first-hand the destruction of a way of life.

The magnitude of this disaster is enough to challenge anyone's psychological health. People are experiencing strong emotions as a result of these enormous challenges. Also, some are worrying about unknown outcomes, such as the health effects of exposure to the oil and dispersants, as well as how these may contaminate the drinking water, food and air.

The extent to which we can recover, rebuild and go on with life-as-we-know-it is uncertain.

Reasons for hope

Extreme hardships can be part of living. Unfortunately, people rarely make it through life without experiencing some form of tragedy.

As overwhelming as the current challenges are in the Gulf, there are ways to work through these trying times and move on. We know from psychological research that people who have endured very challenging life circumstances can manage to get through them and build satisfying lives. Survivors of tragedy can actually experience positive growth in the months and years that follow. Research shows that people can learn to feel positive about their own personal strengths, relate better to others, become open to new possibilities, experience spiritual change, and have a greater appreciation for life.

In addition, previous oil disasters have been cleaned up sufficiently to restore some ways of life. In 1979, a Mexican oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico released millions of gallons of crude oil into the water. In the 31 years since that disaster, the Gulf has rebounded. In addition to manmade recovery efforts, naturally occurring ocean microorganisms helped to break down the oil over time.

Understanding loss

This enormous spill shares similarities with other devastating life experiences. In this particular situation, the loss of livelihood, property and/or community can feel as devastating as the death of a loved one, the diagnosis of a serious illness, a divorce or the aftermath of a terrorist attack. These losses are often accompanied by feelings of disbelief or shock, anger, confusion, anxiety, sadness, being overwhelmed, or unable to make decisions or take actions. These are common initial reactions to devastating life situations and they tend to lessen over time.

Researchers who have studied grief and loss identify a number of stages that people can experience. These include denial (disbelief), anger, bargaining (trying to negotiate things that can be changed in order to get back what was lost), depression and acceptance. People move back and forth between these stages over time as they are adjusting to the loss. Grief is a highly individualized process; everyone approaches it in a slightly different manner and its duration can vary. Grieving important losses is often a painful and difficult process that allows for moving beyond loss and building a future.

In addressing how the Gulf situation is affecting you personally, you may experience some of these stages of loss. The tragedy may also evoke feelings and memories of past losses. These are common reactions and may be natural ways of managing the loss of a way of life.

Building resilience

Resilience is the ability to "bounce back" from adversity and adapt to changing circumstances. It involves skills that people can learn and apply in their daily lives.

The American Psychological Association offers the following ways people can build resilience and better manage difficult life experiences. These recommendations may help you to better handle the current Gulf disaster.

- **Make connections.** Good relationships with close family members, friends or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.
- **Accept that change is a part of living.** Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.
- **Move toward your goals.** Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly—even if it seems like a small accomplishment—that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"
- **Take decisive actions.** Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.
- **Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.
- **Nurture a positive view of yourself.** Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
- **Take care of yourself.** Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Source: American Psychological Association, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/oil-outlook.aspx>

Coping With Crisis in the Media

The news can be full of stories about unexpected or bad things, including the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. The scary thing is—it may seem like the oil spill is happening all around you, even in places where you feel secure like work, school, the mall and at home. Seeing imagery on TV or even experiencing them firsthand can cause you to feel uncertain, worried or scared. These feelings may last even after the event is over.

Here are some tips to understanding the news and what you see and hear:

- **The news doesn't talk about everyday activities.** Instead, the news talks about things that are out of the ordinary—both good and bad. Sometimes it seems like the news captures more of the bad stuff—and the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is a newsworthy event.
- **You will see stories over and over about the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.** This doesn't mean the events are changing all the time—it just means that the news is talking about it again. The news covered it when it first happened and then will repeat the story until it comes to a close—even if there are very little new details.
- **Disasters or tragic events can bring out the best in people:** Firefighters and police officers are doing their jobs (like saving people) and volunteers and everyday citizens also are there to help. You will see people in your community volunteering to bring food and clothing to help those who are affected, families coming together to help each other out, and shelters being put into place to give people a place to stay. You can get involved too!

It is normal to be concerned about what you hear in the news. However, it is important to know that while things may seem uncertain for a while, your life usually will return to normal fairly soon.

Weave your own safety net

Following these tips can help you get on with your day-to-day life, even during stressful times.

- **Talk to your friends and your family and spend time with them.** If you find yourself feeling unsafe, uncertain, worried, or scared, or if you don't understand what is going on around you, talk to your parents, professors or a school counselor. Your parents or others can help explain these events so you can understand things better. By talking with your friends and your family, you can share your feelings and know you are not alone. Plus, spending time with them may help you feel more safe and secure.
- **Help out others.** Sometimes when you are concerned about what is going on around you, it is helpful to give others support. Even if you aren't directly affected by the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, you can help out by raising money, donating clothes or organizing an event like a food drive at your school or work to collect food and/or supplies for organizations that helps the affected environment and people. Even if you and your family are the ones who are affected by this disaster, helping others can help you deal with your own stress—it may make you feel a little more in control.
- **Write down your feelings.** Writing your feelings down—in a diary, a journal, or even on a piece of scrap paper—is a great way to get things off of your chest. You can write down how you feel, what's going on in your life, or anything else!
- **Stick to your normal routine.** There is comfort in the little things you do every day—so keep on doing them! Take care of yourself. Get lots of sleep, eat well and be physically active.

- **Take a break from the TV news.** Watch a funny movie, get together with friends, or read a funny book or magazine. Too much information about the Gulf of Mexico oil spill can get you down, so try a change of pace. Did you know that smiling has been proven to improve your mood? That can help you feel like new and take your mind off things for a while.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, BAM! Body and Mind, www.bam.gov

Hazardous Materials Incidents

Hazardous materials are substances that are either flammable or combustible, explosive, toxic, noxious, corrosive, oxidizable, an irritant or radioactive. The Gulf of Mexico oil spill is a hazardous material spill that can pose a risk to life, health or property. An incident can result in the evacuation of a few people, a section of a facility or an entire neighborhood.

There are a number of Federal laws that regulate hazardous materials, including: the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA), the Hazardous Materials Transportation Act (HMTA), the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and the Clean Air Act.

Title III of SARA regulates the packaging, labeling, handling, storage and transportation of hazardous materials. The law requires facilities to furnish information about the quantities and health effects of materials used at the facility, and to promptly notify local and State officials whenever a significant release of hazardous materials occurs.

Planning considerations

Consider the following when developing your plan:

- Identify and label all hazardous materials stored, handled, produced and disposed of by your facility. Follow government regulations that apply to your facility. Obtain material safety data sheets (MSDS) for all hazardous materials at your location.
- Ask the local fire department for assistance in developing appropriate response procedures.
- Train employees to recognize and report hazardous material spills and releases. Train employees in proper handling and storage.
- Establish a hazardous material response plan:
 - Establish procedures to notify management and emergency response organizations of an incident.
 - Establish procedures to warn employees of an incident.
 - Establish evacuation procedures.
- Depending on your operations, organize and train an emergency response team to confine and control hazardous material spills in accordance with applicable regulations.
- Identify other facilities in your area that use hazardous materials. Determine whether an incident could affect your facility.
- Identify highways, railroads and waterways near your facility used for the transportation of hazardous materials. Determine how a transportation accident near your facility could affect your operations.
- In addition to on-site hazards, you should be aware of the potential for an off-site incident affecting your operations. You should also be aware of hazardous materials used in facility processes and in the construction of the physical plant. Detailed definitions as well as lists of hazardous materials can be obtained from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Source: FEMA, www.fema.gov/business/guide/section3b.shtm#header1

Self-care Tips for Emergency and Disaster Response Workers

Normal reactions to a disaster event, including the Gulf of Mexico oil spill

- No one who responds to a mass casualty event is untouched by it.
- Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- You may not want to leave the scene until the work is finished.
- You will likely try to override stress and fatigue with dedication and commitment.
- You may deny the need for rest and recovery time.

Signs that you may need stress management assistance

- difficulty communicating thoughts
- difficulty remembering instructions
- difficulty maintaining balance
- uncharacteristically argumentative
- difficulty making decisions
- limited attention span
- unnecessary risk-taking
- tremors/headaches/nausea
- tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- colds or flu-like symptoms.
- disorientation or confusion
- difficulty concentrating
- loss of objectivity
- easily frustrated
- unable to engage in problem-solving
- unable to let down when off duty
- refusal to follow orders
- refusal to leave the scene
- increased use of drugs/alcohol
- unusual clumsiness

Ways to help manage your stress

- Limit on-duty work hours to no more than 12 hours per day.
- Make work rotations from high stress to lower stress functions.
- Make work rotations from the scene to routine assignments, as you're able.
- Use counseling assistance programs available through your agency.
- Drink plenty of water and eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit and whole grain breads and other energy foods at the scene.
- Take frequent, brief breaks from the scene as you're able.
- Talk about your emotions to process what you have seen and done.
- Stay in touch with your family and friends.
- Participate in memorials, rituals and use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Pair up with a responder so that you may monitor one another's stress.

Source: U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ken-01-0098/Default.asp>

Helping Others: Finding Opportunities to Volunteer, Donate

With 24-hour news, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by news about the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. We want to help, but how can we determine if our money and time will be used effectively?

Volunteering in your community

Start by checking your local government's website—city, county or state. In times of disaster, the local government will let you know how best to help. Typically, they'll list donations needed and collection sites, personnel needed and skill-sets sought, calls for specialized equipment and requests for volunteers.

Most local churches and synagogues are already networked into the nonprofit community at the national and local level and can respond quickly to emergencies. A number of local businesses also organize collection drives and fundraisers; check with your Chamber of Commerce. Local newspapers and news stations also list ways for people to help.

Ways to volunteer locally:

- Collect requested items; deliver items to a distribution center.
- Offer to house displaced persons or animals.
- Organize a fundraiser.
- Volunteer in advance with a local charitable organization or your community's emergency-response team.

Guidelines for giving

First and foremost, determine if the organization is reputable. Reputable organizations will have easily accessible information regarding contacts, their mission and how their funds are spent—how much goes directly to the cause versus administrative overhead.

The Internet has made the research easy. Start by visiting an organization's website, then cross-check that organization with a charity watchdog, which provides objective information on an organization's worthiness or unworthiness. The National Crime Prevention Council suggests CharityWatch.org, www.bbb.org/us/charity/, Guidestar.org and CharityChoices.com.

An organization must have tax-exempt status with the IRS for your donation to be deductible. Research the IRS online (irs.gov) list of tax-exempt organizations for the most up-to-date information. The site also lists types of charities that don't qualify, as well as charities that have been suspended.

Additional tips:

- Don't give to a charity you have never heard of.
- Never feel rushed to give on the spot—ask for the information to be sent to you.
- Make sure you have full contact information—address, phone number.
- Write checks or use a credit card rather than give cash.
- Only give out a credit card if you're 100 percent sure the charity is legitimate.
- Don't give your Social Security number.
- Keep records of all donations.
- Give directly to the charity instead of to an intermediary organization.
- Stay away from any organizations that use chain letters or high-pressure or overly emotional appeals, promise special treatment by the police or fire departments or have names that sound like other well-known charities but are slightly different.

- When giving on the Internet, make sure the site uses security-related technology before you give personal or financial information; you should see an unbroken key or lock symbol in the corner and/or the letters “https:” (as opposed to “http:”) before the URL address.

To report a fraud

Unfortunately, it’s very easy to set up a fake charity, and some spring up with every new crisis. If you believe you’ve been hoodwinked:

- Contact your local law enforcement agency.
- Contact your local state attorney general’s office; a list can be found at the National Association of Attorney Generals (naag.org).
- File a complaint with the Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance (www.bbb.org/us/charity/) or with one of the other charity watchdog organizations listed above.

Resources

Below is a list of some organizations where you can donate your time or money to help with the Gulf of Mexico oil spill relief effort.

Alabama

American Red Cross:

<http://www.redcrossalcoast.org/HOME/tabid/36/Default.aspx>

Public: (251) 544-6100

Salvation Army Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi:

http://www.uss.salvationarmy.org/uss/www_uss_alm.nsf

Public: (800) SAL-ARMY

United Way of Southwest Alabama:

<http://uwsua.org/index.asp>

Public: (251) 433-3624

To volunteer:

<https://agencytools.uwca.org/oilvolunteers/>

Public: 2-1-1 (Local) (888) 421-1266

Donations:

- United Way of Southwest Alabama, <http://uwsua.org/give/give.asp>
- Governor’s Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, <http://vad.aidmatrix.org/vadxml.cfm?driveid=2604>

Florida:

American Red Cross:

<http://www.floridaredcross.org/>

(800) 773-7620

United Way of Florida:

Visit <http://www.uwof.org/local/index.htm> to find out how to contact your local United Way chapter.

Salvation Army:

http://www.uss.salvationarmy.org/uss/www_uss_florida.nsf

Public: (800) SAL-ARMY

To volunteer:

For a list of volunteer opportunities by county, visit <http://www.volunteerfloridadisaster.org/volunteer.html>

Donations:

- Florida Volunteer and Donations Hotline: (800) FL-HELP1 ((800) 354-3571)
- Audubon of Florida needs donations to protect and rehabilitate shorebirds and seabirds, if the need arises. Visit <https://loon.audubon.org/payment/donate/FLAUDPOL.html> to donate.
- The Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida is seeking donations to assist with cleanup efforts. Visit <http://www.pensacolawildlife.com/> to donate.

Louisiana:

American Red Cross:

<http://batonrouge.redcross.org/>

Public: (225) 291-4533

United Way:

<http://www.unitedwaynola.org/gulfoilspill/index.html>

Public: 2-1-1 (Local) (504) 822-5540

Salvation Army Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi:

http://www.uss.salvationarmy.org/uss/www_uss_alm.nsf

Public: (800) SAL-ARMY

To volunteer:

www.volunteerlouisiana.gov

Public: 2-1-1 (Local) (800) 755-5175

Mississippi:

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross-msgc.org/>

Public: (228) 896-4511

Salvation Army Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi:

http://www.uss.salvationarmy.org/uss/www_uss_alm.nsf

Public: 1-800-SAL-ARMY

United Way of South Mississippi:

<http://www.uw-sm.org/>

Public: (228) 896-2213

To volunteer:

- Volunteer Mississippi,
<http://www.volunteermississippi.org/1800Vol/OpenIndexAction.do#Gulf%20of%20Mexico%20Oil%20Spill%20Response>
- United Way of South Mississippi, <http://volunteer.united-e-way.org/uw-sm/volunteer/>
Public: (228) 896-2213

Donations:

The United Way of South Mississippi allows users to designate online donations for the oil spill. Visit <https://volunteer.united-e-way.org/cwosm/donate/> and select "Gulf Oil Spill Crisis Fund."

Texas:

American Red Cross:

<http://www.houstonredcross.org/>

Public: (713) 526-8300

Toll free: (866) 526-8300

United Way of Greater Houston:

<http://www.unitedwayhouston.org/>

Public: 2-1-1 (Local)

Salvation Army:

<http://www.salvationarmytexas.org/>

(800) SAL-ARMY

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