

The National Service Response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill



The Deepwater Horizon BP Oil Spill is one of the most challenging environmental disasters that the country has faced. The communities whose livelihoods are dependent upon the Gulf of Mexico are being severely affected by the oil spill. Demand for clothing, food, employment assistance and crisis counseling, and other social services are mounting.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), building off its experience responding to disasters, is working with its network of community partners and national service resources to launch a short-and long-term effort to leverage citizen service to address the devastating economic, health and environmental impact inflicted by the oil spill. Since the oil spill, the Corporation has worked with Gulf Coast state service commissions to engage national service members and volunteers in a range of activities that support community-based disaster responses.

Service in Action in the Gulf Coast

The Corporation's primary focus in the wake of the disaster is to help mitigate immediate and long-term human, economic and environmental needs through direct service and mobilization and coordination of community volunteers. Through its national service programs, the agency is working with Gulf Coast state service commissions and community organizations to expand their operational capacity and develop strategies to recruit and manage volunteers.

- More than 5,000 volunteers are providing a range of response activities, including lining the shores of the Gulf, monitoring coastlines, pre-landfall beach clean-up, and providing safety net services. Volunteers have participated in BP's safety training and been directed to report any oil on beaches, oiled wildlife, or hazmat materials.
- The Corporation has deployed two AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) teams to support the Mississippi Commission, through the Deepwater Unified Command, by operating and staffing two Volunteer Reception Centers.
- AmeriCorps VISTAs are coordinating and registering volunteers to help meet local human and environmental needs in Pensacola, FL.
- Senior Corps RSVP programs are recruiting and engaging volunteers in environmental response efforts such as coastline monitoring, pre-impact beach cleanup and wildlife rehabilitation.
- More than 500 Learn and Serve Summer of Service members will assist in environmental restoration and public information activities this summer.
- The Corporation's Louisiana state office and the state commission are partnering with Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation to engage volunteers in Coastal Career Fairs. The career fairs are planned in seven coastal parishes beginning in June and ending July 30.

Interagency Collaboration

The Corporation is working closely with designated federal and state response teams to develop, coordinate and execute strategies that leverage citizen service to mitigate the economic, health and environmental impact of a natural disaster. The agency is part of the administra-

tion-wide response to the oil spill and a key member of the Deepwater Integrated Services Team, a federal interagency team that is coordinating supportive services for individuals and small businesses impacted by the spill.

Building Capacity to Address Tomorrow's Challenges

To date, much of the response to the disaster has appropriately been focused on stopping the oil leak, cleaning up oil on the water and shorelines, and rescuing wildlife.

However, disasters have long-term effects on individuals and communities that are often unpredictable and heightened with time. Because of the intensive and sustained nature of national service programs, the Corporation's impact is felt long after the initial phase of the disaster.

The Corporation is launching a multi-faceted, long-term effort to build the capacity of communities and nonprofits to meet the increasing demand for social services and environmental challenges over the long haul. The agency's strategy will focus on:

- Assessing the impact of the oil spill on area residents to determine the most effective deployment of volunteers.
- Enhancing volunteer recruitment, management and coordination capacity of nonprofits to strengthen the impact of volunteer service.
- Enhancing nonprofit capacity to strengthen the health and economic status of communities.
- Enhancing nonprofit capacity to supplement environmental cleanup efforts.
- Building public awareness of local environmental hazards and disaster preparedness efforts as hurricane season approaches.

How Volunteers Can Help

The complex nature of oil cleanup, coupled with health and safety concerns, restricts the role of volunteers. The Deepwater Unified Area Command under the direction of Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen has specified that volunteers or unpaid individuals are not allowed to perform hands-on hazardous waste remediation.

Visit Serve.gov to learn about volunteer opportunities with Gulf Coast state service commissions. Volunteers are also encouraged to support disaster relief organizations responding to the spill and to volunteer with human service agencies and nonprofits in the region that are experiencing increased demand due to the effects of the oil spill.

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