

Mayor Ken Kechl
Talking Points/News Conference 4 p.m.
Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Preps

I've been paying close attention to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Northern portion of the Gulf of Mexico since it began...coincidentally it occurred about the same time that I was in Washington, DC and then Tallahassee speaking to our legislators about Broward County's long standing opposition to offshore oil drilling.

As you're aware, there are measures being taken to cap the oil well in the Gulf—and we're hoping these will lessen the potential impact of the oil spill, which is the focus of concern in South Florida and the Gulf States.

Every day our emergency management team has been in contact with Federal and State officials in order to keep up to date on the status of the oil spill and the efforts that are being made to contain the incident.

We have assembled a working group of representatives from Broward County agencies that have the most knowledge and expertise in this area. Those team members are with me today. Emergency Management Director Chuck Lanza, Port Everglades Deputy Director Glenn Wiltshire, Eric Myers and Steve Higgins from Broward County's Environmental Protection Department and Nicki Grossman from the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau. We are also very grateful that United States Coast Guard Captain Jim Fitton is here with us today and Broward County Sheriff Al Lamberti.

At this time we are most concerned about the oil plume that you see on this map, drifting into the “loop current” causing it to eventually make its way from the Gulf of Mexico, into the Florida Straits and then north into the Atlantic.

Yesterday, the U.S. Coast Guard told me that NOAA estimates that we are several weeks away from the arrival of any oil, IF any even makes it this far. And we don’t know if that is going to happen.

The probability of that occurring depends on many factors such as currents and wind that are unpredictable.

As of today, Broward County is NOT within the projected impact area in any near-term forecast models. There are no advisories recommending against travel or recreation in South Florida. Timing and the extent of impact, if any, is impossible to accurately project at this time.

But, we know that we have a lot at stake. This map shows you the areas that are most vulnerable to environmental contamination—various species of birds, mangroves, marine life, our coral reef and our pristine beaches. Our economy could also be negatively impacted because of our strong and enviable tourism and cruise industry.

So as a responsible elected official, I know that at this point in time..there is no reason to panic... But we have a responsibility to be ready and to prepare—and I hope and pray that we never have to put these plans into action.

Right now, as we continue to monitor the situation...we are taking a number of steps that will better enable us to respond to whatever may come our way---and then, if necessary, begin clean-up as soon as possible to minimize damage to our environment.

Through numerous conference calls and meetings we are getting a complete picture of what resources are available, where and when deployment will provide the greatest benefit, and what support we can expect from our federal and State partners.

The United States Coast Guard and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection are lead agencies responsible for this incident. Broward County will partner with these agencies if our area is impacted.

Right now, we want to insure that there are sufficient resources available and in place if we need them.

Our focus is on preparation and planning.

To that end, we are taking a broad inventory and have reached out to our cities to determine what assets we currently possess within the county and what assets we may need to acquire. Such equipment could include booms, oil absorbent materials, skimmers, pumps, vacuums, industrial equipment, etc.

One priority will be to do what we can to prevent any oil contamination from entering into our inlets at Port Everglades and Hillsboro Beach and of course from arriving onto our beaches.

Port Everglades—which handles large amounts of petroleum everyday-- has contingency plans that address the possibility of an oil spill in the Port and we may employ some of those strategies—which could include placing booms at our two inlets to reduce the amount of material that could enter into the intracoastal waterway.

Our environmental monitoring laboratory will continue with standard operating procedures that include routine water and air quality testing and is prepared to step up those efforts if that should ever become necessary.

Our Environmental Protection Department is working with the coordinators of various waterway and coastal cleanup organizations to solicit volunteers skilled in cleanup work.

In addition to this we have received interest from the national Wildlife Federation Stewards and Greater Fort Lauderdale Flyways Coalition and

are approaching Audubon Society and Sierra Club to determine their interest in volunteering for this kind of duty.

The Sawgrass Nature Center & Wildlife Hospital is also gearing up for, and looking for supplies and equipment for treating oil impacted wildlife.

We also want to solicit the help of the general public, should we need volunteers to assist in the possible cleanup efforts. Our 3-1-1 calling system is now accepting calls from those who would like to volunteer or from people who may have expertise and or equipment or material that may be used in the event of a clean-up effort.

While there is much uncertainty on whether oil from the spill will leave the Gulf, we are being proactive through verifying and updating sensitive area information already within existing contingency plans, and inventorying resources available to protect those sensitive areas and recover any oil that may impact our coastline. Those resources include equipment available from federal, state, county and local governments, the private sector, and registering volunteers that may be able if needed to safely assist with response efforts.

The County is planning and preparing in a manner very similar to what we have historically done for hurricanes and other emergencies that affect the county.

We expect total reimbursement from any costs that we may incur.

Again, I cannot stress enough...that this is not a time for panic. Right now, there is no threat to Broward County—and there may never be.

We are hopeful that efforts to cap this oil leak will be successful and that we will be spared the tragedy of environmental contamination that would be detrimental to our pristine beaches, marine life, wildlife, and environmentally sensitive coral reefs, seagrass and mangroves.

However, we are good skilled managers and good managers...good leaders... prepare for whatever threat may come our way. And that's what we're doing...

Thank you...are there any questions?????