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# Gulf of Mexico Program

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **NAVY/ NW FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMPLIANCE PARTNERING TEAM WINS 2<sup>ND</sup> PLACE GULF GUARDIAN AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE AND ASSESSMENT TRAINING PROGRAM**

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, Miss. – The Gulf of Mexico Program recently announced that Navy / NW Florida Department of Environmental Protection Compliance Partnering Team will receive a second place Gulf Guardian Award for 2003 in the Government Category for their environmental training program. The award will be presented to Navy and partnership representatives at the Southern States Environmental Conference and Exhibition scheduled Sept. 23-25, in Biloxi.

Four years ago the Gulf of Mexico Program developed the Gulf Guardian awards as a method of recognizing and honoring the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. The Gulf of Mexico Program began in 1988 to protect, restore, and maintain the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem in economically sustainable ways. Award entries were received from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. A first, second, and third place award are given each year in six categories – individual, business, youth and education, nonprofit organizations, government, and partnership efforts.

“Our oceans and coasts are precious resources,” said Jimmy Palmer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator in Atlanta. “Coastal and marine waters provide some of the most diverse and biologically productive habitats on the planet,” he added. “This year’s Gulf Guardian Award winners are doing their part to keep these valuable resources healthy and productive.”

"NAS Pensacola is the cradle of naval aviation. It is less well known as the cradle of military environmental partnerships," said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary David B. Struhs. "This compliance partnership serves as a model for military bases around the nation – its unparalleled success is proof that we can achieve our defense and environmental objectives together."

Navy Region Gulf Coast, which includes Naval Air Stations Pensacola and Whiting Field, determined that it needed to provide environmental management training to all personnel working on the bases to prevent the introduction of harmful materials into the Gulf of Mexico. In September 1999 the Navy team, headed by Robert Stender, an environmental engineer with the Region, working in collaboration with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, established the basic environmental management educational requirements for all personnel living or working on the base. Navy Region Gulf Coast has extensive frontage on the Gulf of Mexico, as well as on rivers which flow into the Gulf. Past activities indicated that potentially harmful materials could be introduced into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The training program has eliminated this problem and also provided invaluable training to contractors who work on or off the local Navy installations.

Gulf of Mexico Program Office Acting Director Bryon O. Griffith said, “Our 2003 Gulf Guardian Award winners are to be commended for taking action to preserve and restore the Gulf of Mexico.” “One out of every six jobs in the United States is marine-related, generating \$54 billion in goods and services annually. Protecting these waters makes sense economically, aesthetically, and environmentally. Acting as one community to protect our one and only Gulf of Mexico is essential to our way of life and our standard of living.”

For a list of all the Gulf Guardian Award winners for 2003, visit the Gulf of Mexico Program web site at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo> and click on the Gulf Guardian Award button on the left.

The Gulf of Mexico Program is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a non-regulatory, inclusive consortium of state and federal government agencies and representatives of the business and agricultural community, fishing industry, scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders from all five Gulf States. The Gulf Program seeks to improve the environmental health of the Gulf in concert with economic development.

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*Editor's Note: For more information about the Gulf Guardian Awards and the Gulf of Mexico Program, call Terry Hines Smith at 228-688-1159. For more information about the NASP Environmental Training Program call Robert Stender at 850-452-4022 or Sally Coeey with the FL Department of Environmental Protection at 850-595-8300, ext. 1180.*