EPA

Moderator: Eryn Witcher
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1:00 pm CT

Operator: Good afternoon. My name is (Cynthia) and I will be your conference facilitator today. At this time I would like to welcome everyone to the test results from Hurricane Katrina and Rita conference call.

All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. After the speaker's remarks, there will be a question and answer period. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star then the number 1 on your telephone keypad.

If you would like to withdraw your question, press star then the number 2 on your telephone keypad. Thank you. Mr. Witcher, you may begin your conference.

Eryn Witcher: Thank you for joining us today. We are joined with the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Center for Environmental Health at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, ATSDR and also the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

We're going to go over some recent results that have been released and then we'll open it up for questions and answers.

With LDQ, we're joined by (Chris Rovery), the Department of Quality's Administrator for Air Quality and also Dwight Bradshaw, the Senior Environment Scientist at LDEQ.

Administrator Steve Johnson with the EPA will open us up with some opening remarks and then we'll turn it over to Dr. Howard Frumkin with ATSDR. And then we'll open it up to questions and answers to everyone.

Just for spelling for EPA is Stephen, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, L. Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N. And for ATSDR you'll be hearing from Dr. Howard Frumkin, F-R-U-M-K-I-N. And with that, we'll turn it over to the administrator.

Stephen Johnson: Thanks very much Eryn. And thank you all for joining me today. This call is a part of EPA's ongoing commitment to provide the public with timely accurate and useful information.

From the first days after Hurricane Katrina hit, I committed EPA to releasing sampling data as soon as it was verified. And I'm proud to say that we've done that.

And EPA continues to help in providing our federal, state and local partners with information about potential hazards during the recovery and re-population process in the Gulf Coast region.

This is a massive response effort. And we are only as effective as our teamwork. My charge has been and continues to be collaborate, collaborate and collaborate.

Over the past few days, EPA has released a number of sampling results and I'd like to briefly discuss our findings and then turn it over to a number of our - my colleagues here for questions and answers.

To begin, EPA released results from five national priority lists hazardous waste sites in the New Orleans area. The data for these results were collected from September the 30th through October the 2nd. Sampling results at three of the sites, the agricultural street landfill, the southern ship building and the Madison Creosote Works showed they were not affected by the hurricane. That is not affected by the hurricane.

At the Bayou Bonfouca site, some chemical concentrations were detected in the water samples, but these detections did not exceed the Region 6 screening levels for tap water. No contamination in the drinking water supply has been reported.

And at the (Gillette) Metals site, four metals were detected in the water samples, however no contamination has been found in any of the private wells. We will continue to monitor the well water at both of these sites. EPA is collecting samples at additional MPL sites in the impacted area. And we'll post those and make those available to you as soon as they become available.

Second, we released our initial results from air monitoring networks in Mississippi and Louisiana. The existing air quality monitoring networks in these states as I have previously noted were badly damaged by the hurricanes. These networks provide important air quality information so that EPA in coordination with the state, so Louisiana and Mississippi, we've been working to restore them.

Results of limited sampling from these air quality monitoring networks are now available on EPA's Web site. This sampling began the first week of October.

Samples were collected at three Louisiana and six Mississippi sites. Levels of most pollutants detected were below the screening levels. Two sites however, showed elevated levels of two volatile organic compounds. And the state of Mississippi and EPA are looking into their potential sources on the dates that they were sampled.

At one site near the County Health Department in Pascagoula, Mississippi, samples showed levels for formaldehyde on two dates which were much higher than levels detected during the three previous tests.

EPA is continuing to monitor in these communities and a review of preliminary data collected on more recent dates indicate that formaldehyde concentrations are retuning to lower levels.

In addition, a monitor located at Stennis Space Center in Mississippi measured levels of (acrolin) or acrolein, that's A-C-R-O-L-E-I-N on two dates that were much higher than levels measured earlier. Preliminary levels continue to fluctuate between undetected and elevated above the screening levels. EPA will continue to monitor and provide additional air quality information as soon as it becomes available.

We understand that citizens and state and local government agencies will continue to look to EPA and our partners for our technical expertise, look to us for scientifically sound data and practical advice on environmental conditions in the region. And I hope the data we're discussing today offers

more of this needed information to the public and local decision makers as repopulation of the area continues.

The last two data results that I wanted to mention include the Murphy Oil spill and the Mississippi Coastal Water Testing. EPA is overseeing the Murphy Oil ongoing sampling activity. Nearly 1500 samples have been collected to date by Murphy Oil including around area schools. And 10% of those have been independently analyzed by EPA.

EPA's results show that several samples exceeded screening levels for residential soil of polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbon also known as PAHes. Diesel and oil in the range of organic chemicals, that whole area. And then the last was our results show several samples exceeding screening levels for arsenic.

EPA continues to issue the agencies previous warnings that residents returning to the area should avoid direct contact with the crude oil sediments.

The fourth area of sampling that I mentioned, EPA and the Mississippi Department of Environmental quality have completed a water quality study along the Mississippi Coast. Today's results complement those released several weeks ago pertaining to water quality testing conducted on the ocean survey vessel (Bull) in offshore waters in the Mississippi Sound and the Gulf of Mexico.

Overall, the data collected by EPA and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality show that few water quality criteria were exceeded during this study. That is few criteria were exceeded.

In areas where elevated contamination levels were found, EPA and MDEQ will continue to evaluate the need for additional site specific studies that determine if there is any further short term environmental impact.

At this time, samples collected show bacterial concentrations at or below what EPA considers suitable for swimming. Let me repeat that.

At this time, samples collected show bacterial concentrations at or below levels EPA considers suitable for swimming.

To determine if there's any - there may be long term effects of the hurricane, certainly additional data will be collected.

Moving forward, EPA will continue to work with our partners to monitor the air, the water and sediment quality in the region and make sure that this information is readily available to officials, responders and the public.

The effectiveness of a response hinges on the effectives of our partnership. Hence, when I said my direction was and continues to be collaborate, collaborate and collaborate, that's what we're doing.

I'd now like to turn the microphone over to Dr. Frumkin of ATSDR. He is the Director of the National Center for Environmental Health for ATSDR. Howard?

Howard Frumkin: Thank you very much Administrator Johnson and welcome all participants on the call.

ATSDR is a federal public health agency that addresses the health effects of exposure to environmental containments. As the Administrator mentioned, we

collaborate closely with EPA and other federal partners as well as with state and local authorities as we're addressing problems of environmental contamination.

One of the central parts of our efforts is to help with the review and evaluation of environmental data and to help interpret for decision makers and members of the public what the health effects of the exposures would be.

As part of that effort, ATSDR just this week released a report on the Murphy Oil spill. And that's the part of Administrator Johnson's briefing that I'd like to pick up on and review the conclusions that we reached in the report.

First ATSDR does not recommend moving back into homes that have visible oil contamination in the vicinity of the Murphy Oil spill. There is a potential for people's skin to be exposed to oil substances and for inadvertent ingestion of oil containing materials if people are in the proximity to those homes.

Contact with oil and petroleum products can cause skin rashes. Exposure to sunlight can make the rash worse. There may also be concerns with regard to respiratory irritation from breathing particles that are contaminated in those areas.

Second, ATSDR recommends that children and pets do not enter areas still contaminated with oil residue. Children are more susceptible to coming into contact with oil residue. Pets may also come into contact with residue and then may have contact with their owners and thereby pose an exposure risk.

Third, if people do decide to reenter areas still contaminated with oil residue, they should take precautions to avoid exposure to the residue. Those precautions include protecting skin from coming into contact with oil residue.

Some examples of precautions include using oil-resistant gloves, keeping arms and legs covered, wearing coveralls or clothing that can be left at the oil contaminated residence after use.

If people get oil on their skin, they should immediately wash with soap and water. And we recommend wearing boot covers or leaving work boots at the oil contaminated residence.

As a precaution, we recommended opening doors and windows to ventilate the oil contaminated residences during the time of reentry. We recommend not transporting oil contaminated items from oil contaminated residences to non-contaminated locations.

I want to note and acknowledge that these very same recommendations are those that have been on the State of Louisiana Department of Health Web site for several weeks now and we fully endorse these recommendations.

Finally with regard to workers entering the Murphy Oil spill vicinity, we recommend appropriate protective clothing including the use as I mentioned before, of oil resistant gloves, boots and clothing.

And that concludes my recount of our just issued report. Thank you very much.

Eryn Witcher: Thank you. At this time we will open it up to questions And can we get some help in reminding reporters how to signal an operator that they'd like to ask a question?

Operator: Yes ma'am. At this time, if you would like to ask a question, please press star then the number 1 on your telephone keypad. We will pause for just a moment to compile the Q&A roster.

Cain Burdeau with Associated Press. We'll take your question.

Cain Burdeau: All right. Hello. This is a question for Administrator Johnson. It would appear at this point that looking at all the sampling that has come in, that Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita were not the environmental disasters that many people had feared initially. I'd like for you to speak to that.

And I guess I should also ask my other questions at this point as well, is that correct?

Eryn Witcher: Go ahead.

Cain Burdeau: All right. Also why did Louisiana only have three sites that were monitor for air quality as compared to Mississippi that has six?

And also what - is there any - was there any considering in the hurricane people not to - residents not to even go back to clean up their properties in the Murphy Oil spill area? Those were my three questions.

Eryn Witcher: Great. Let's start with the questions about the air monitors and talk about that process.

Cain Burdeau: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: We have a expert from…

Man: There's an expert from our air office. I believe…

Eryn Witcher: (Jan)?

Man: Yes, go ahead.

(Jan): The question about the monitors, the disparity in the number of monitors between Mississippi and New Orleans, there are in fact three affected areas in Mississippi and they're covered by the three monitoring locations.

There are active currently, six monitors in New Orleans. But there are established locations for more which provided available equipment and a reason to begin to monitor in those locations we have the capability of expanding the monitoring beyond the six that are currently reporting.

Man: Let me add the infrastructure in New Orleans was more seriously affected. So it took more time to get sites with power and chain link fences set up.

Eryn Witcher: And can you give us a more specific question about what your question is regarding Murphy Oil?

Cain Burdeau: Well I've been going down there for the last several weeks and quite a few residents are going in cleaning up their properties. And I'm just wondering, I don't think at any point were people told specifically not to go back or to - and to wait for it to be cleaned up. And I understand that. So EPA is saying, we'll we're not going to clean up people's - inside of people's homes. It's up to the state or the local government.

And I know EPA has offered to clean up people's - the insides of homes in other areas. I'm just wondering why - what could have - I mean…

Stephen Johnson: Yes, this is Administrator Johnson. First of all, I'm not aware that we've offered to go in and clean up people's homes there in any part of New Orleans.

With regard to the Murphy Oil spill, Murphy Oil is the responsible party and they are the ones who are cleaning it up. And they are doing it so under the direction of both the Coast Guard because of the water issues and of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

So they are the ones who - they, Murphy Oil, are the ones who are taking all the necessary steps. And as a prudent measure, we decided to split the samples and actually do some independent verification. And that's why I mentioned the results that I did.

Eryn Witcher: We have two other experts on the phone. I mean I think we can talk more about the health findings of ATSDR which I think Dr. Frumkin went over but also LDEQ, do you have anything to add?

Dwight Bradshaw: This is Dwight Bradshaw, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. One thing I could add to that, he's concerned about residents returning to that area. It really was not a state decision to allow them to return. We recommended as the EPA did that they wait until we're certain that it's safe for them to return.

However, the decision to allow the residents to return to their homes to recover what personal property they could and do what they could to recover from the storm is really made by the parish government.

Cain Burdeau: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: Okay great. Next question.

Richard Greene: Eryn, let me just comment. This is Richard Greene, Regional Administrator in Dallas, just as a follow-up on Administrator's Johnson's comment about (our) role in the oversight of the work that Murphy is doing, I was out there yesterday with our on scene coordinator who took me on a tour and describe his understanding and his oversight of the work that Murphy is proceeding with in their cleanup effort.

The description that we get is pretty comprehensive. But it also requires cooperation from property owners to allow them access and to give them permission to do some of the cleaning up that they're proposing. And that is underway. But that activity is taking place on a daily basis now. And our oversight will continue throughout.

Operator: Your next question comes from Juliet Eilperin with the Washington Post.

Juliet Eilperin: Hi. I was - wondering, two questions. Administrator Johnson, can you just give an overall having compiled all these different statistics, where you think the lay of the land is now in terms of the health impacts of Katrina on the environment given what you found in testing?

And also, I was just wondering if you could talk a little more about Murphy Oil and just give us a little more perspective on kind of where things stand with it and how broad an area are we talking about -- that kind of stuff?

Stephen Johnson: Well I think broadly speaking there still are a number of issues that the region and we are all working with the state officials and local officials to address.

There are still some brick and mortar systems and waste water treatments that are not fully operations.

So the infrastructure - and again, by the nature of the storms, for that area, there's still, while there's been significant progress, great progress -- I don't know what the latest number is, but well over 85% are operating and doing well. But there's still a number that are not.

So infrastructure continues to be an issue that we are working on.

Second is just the sheer volume of debris and the nature of the debris ranging from vegetation to hazardous waste. And while we are in particularly the Corp. or Engineers and the state and in some cases the state and local are making great progress, the sheer volume is still staggering and will take many months to deal with.

And of course that needs to be done in a health and environmentally responsibility way which we are working collaboratively to help ensure that happens. So that is a - so that continues to be an issue.

Third is there are a number of sites, five major oils spills. We still are assessing the number of the NPL sites as I've mentioned. And clearly as we just stated, that we have serious concerns about potential exposure to Murphy Oil contaminated sediments. And so that is an area.

Juliet Eilperin: Right.

Stephen Johnson: Another area which is not - is not the if you will, in the EPA purview but -- and I'll let Dr. Frumkin talk about -- and that is mold and those kinds of

issues. And (Al) if you want to - I don't know if there's anything else to add to that, but that's another area.

Dr. Howard Frumkin: Well we are concerned about the mold issues as people reenter buildings that have been wet and in a warm climate for some time, mold exposures are inevitable. Mold can be hazardous to people who are sensitive. We are concerned about anecdotal reports of cough and other respiratory symptoms. And we're watching that very carefully. So that may emerge as one of the environmental health challenges over coming weeks to months.

Eryn Witcher: LDQ, do you want to add?

(Chris Rovery): Well I know our health department has been working with a lot of our citizens. This is (Chris Rovery), the Administrator for our quality division here.

Our Health Department has been working with citizens and putting out information to try to help citizens understand the risks associated with mold and things they should do as they go back into their homes to clean up.

Eryn Witcher: Great. Thank you. Next question?

Operator: Your next question comes from Dina Capiello with Houston Chronicle.

Eryn Witcher: Oh actually I'm sorry. Dina, can you hold one second?

Dina Capiello: Sure.

Eryn Witcher: We didn't answer the question about Murphy. If we can maybe just talk a little more generally about what the - I think give a better overview of how the

sampling is taking place, I think that might be helpful. Can we get someone from Region 6 to help us out with that?

Richard Greene: Yes Eryn, this is Richard Greene again. Let me just kind of give a bit of an overview. And then if we need to get more specific, we certainly can.

What we and the states have done working with local officials is identified the parameter of where the spill reached. And so we have a map that shows the outline of the area based on where we could find any evidence of petroleum oil type products.

When you draw that map, included within the area is about 1700 residential properties. And they have been described as heavily oiled, moderately oiled and lightly oiled. I'm not sure that that's a real scientific description. But it's an attempt to talk about that those properties that were nearest the fence line. And many of these residents literally back up to the Murphy Oil refinery and many of the residents in this area work there.

And obviously those that are closest to that tank that was dislodged by the storm are the ones that have the greatest amount of oil around them. And of course the depth of the flooding that took place then caused the oil to rise up to levels that were very near the roof in those that are the heavily oiled category.

And then as there was less flooding and the oil spill began to dissipate in the parameter of the area, then you get like I said before, sort of the unscientific designation of lightly oiled. But we've tried to be conservative in the sense of being careful to identify that area so that all impacts be they little or be they great, become a part of the responsibility of Murphy to clean them up.

And so generally speaking, that's the magnitude of the work that's going on. And the questions about whether or not some of those properties could ever be occupied again is a work in progress. Many of these homes are nice homes and I'm sure people would like to rebuild and recover and get their life back to normal. And we'll see as all that takes place, exactly how possible that is.

But as of today, for those of you who've been out there in the field and have seen it, you can understand that there are many questions that really do not have answers today. But we in the state and our other federal partners in a collaborative efforts are assisting the local officials and expecting Murphy to be responsible for their obligations in connection with the cleanup.

Eryn Witcher: And just for clarification, can we go through all the partners involved in this?

Richard Greene: Well I - certainly the EPA ATSDR and assisting in the analysis of the testing and development of the data that we are sharing, the LDEQ, that's Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and the Coast Guard who's immediate response who controlled the spill had continued all the way up to about last week. And so for about two months the Coast Guard has been doing their job in there and continue to be involved and connected with us as well.

Who am I missing? Steve is there somebody else we ought to include in that partnership?

Eryn Witcher: Does anyone else have anything to add? Okay. Great. I'm sorry, go ahead Dina. Sorry about that.

Dina Capiello: No that's okay. That actually answered one of my questions so I'm down to two. The first is I noticed on terms of the air quality that the EPA in

competition with ATSDR set some one year guideline standards if you will, for several DOCs in terms of this disaster.

My question is why did EPA and ATSDR feel compelled to do that? And secondly, has the agency ever done that before in response to an event? That's the first question.

And the (same) question deals with storage tanks and retaining ponds. As Dwight knows, I've been in a helicopter with Dwight recently over Louisiana. A lot of storage tanks were compromised. And the retaining on - around those tanks did not really work or went over them and into communities in the case of Murphy and into marshes in the case of (Bass).

These ponds are supposed to hold 110% of the capacity of what's in those tanks. So why didn't they work in this case? I mean does this 110% capacity include obviously the water in an event like a hurricane or a flood? Those are my two questions?

Eryn Witcher: Okay, we'll start it off with EPA talking about what we did behind our sampling. And then we'll open up to ATSDR to talk about also their screen levels.

(James Henry): This is (James Henry) with OAQPS. The one - the question with regard to the one year screening levels, the rationale behind that was to establish a level that we would evaluate the day they (get it). It was consistent with roughly what we thought the time would be for recovery and debris removal and destruction.

So the idea was these are the - this is the time period at which we think these data will be a reasonable approximation of what we think people - the time period duration that people would be exposed.

Dina Capiello: And have you done that before? Has that been done before in terms of any event?

(James Henry): Yes, for the World Trade Center, the same approach was taken establishing these sub chronic screening levels if you will, or one year screening level.

Eryn Witcher: Okay and then (LD), do you have anything to add?

Dwight Bradshaw: Yes, this is Dwight Bradshaw. Regarding the containment areas for these tanks, the design criteria is for like you said, 110% of the capacity of the biggest tank within an area. But also it's supposed to also contain a ten year rainfall participation event.

Dina Capiello: Okay.

Dwight Bradshaw: However in this particular case, the containment areas were completely overwhelmed by the storm surge. In other words, they went completely under water. So when the water starting receding, the containment areas were already full of water. So the oil then that was released just could not be contained with it - within that area because it's already full of water.

Dina Capiello: Right. Great. Thank…

Dwight Bradshaw: None of them are designed really to cope with the - being completely put under water by a hurricane.

Eryn Witcher: Great. Thank you. Next question?

Operator: Your next question comes from Matt Brown with the Times Picayune.

Matt Brown: Hello. My first question is for Dr. Frumkin is it? You mentioned that there are, sound like anecdotal reports of people with respiratory problems. I wanted to ask what other kinds of sicknesses you're seeing that you think might be environmentally related, how extensive they are.

Dr. Howard Frumkin: We've got tracking going on through the healthcare facilities in the area, both inpatient facilities and some outpatient facilities. So keep in mind the limits of what we know. We don't really have good information about so-called preclinical problems, symptoms people may develop that don't necessarily bring them to a doctor's attention or to a hospital.

That said, what we've seen over the weeks since the disaster and into the present is exactly what's expected. What we didn't see was a lot of infectious disease. We always worry about that after disasters. But as in most disasters, that wasn't seen in this case.

We did see some worrisome blips like carbon monoxide poisoning from the use of generators. We had a number of unfortunate episodes throughout the Gulf region. We saw respiratory symptoms. We have seen a lot of injuries, Injuries ought to be considered an environmental problem because as people go back in for salvage and reconstruction work they're using chain saws and equipment perhaps without familiarity. And so that's a very common problem. That actually predominates in the morbidity patterns that we've been seeing.

I can't comment on the respiratory symptoms. I wish I could. I wish we had better data. But a lot of the coughing probably doesn't come to medical

attention. So all we have is the same thing that you have and that's anecdotal accounts.

But we think it's a real concern. It is plausible that some people are having reactions to exposures to mold or other substances there. And we're working very hard to develop ways to get a better handle on that.

Matt Brown: Okay. And so I don't suppose you have any figures that you could attach to any of those issues in terms of thousands of people, hundreds of people?

Dr. Howard Frumkin: No, not as I sit here now.

Matt Brown: Okay, and you think that the mold though, is the primary - is what you suspect is a primary contributor versus all the dust that's coming from all the sediment that's dried out?

Dr. Howard Frumkin: I don't think we can tease that out right now. Mold is certainly a concern because we know that mold can engender respiratory reactions. There may well be other exposures of concern too.

That said, we don't have a picture of the magnitude of this, the respiratory problem. And so I think there's a lot to learn. As we heard earlier in this call, we have more questions than answers in some areas. And this is one of them.

Matt Brown: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: You know, we're - I want to make sure everyone gets a chance - as many people get a chance to ask questions as possible.

Matt Brown: Could I just follow-up?

Eryn Witcher: Okay, last one.

Matt Brown: Two things real quickly. One (unintelligible) had asked about the air monitoring station. You all said you had three and then the gentlemen who spoke said that there were six in New Orleans? Could somebody just clarify that? How many air monitor stations you have now?

Eryn Witcher: Okay.

(James Henry): I think (unintelligible), this is (James Henry) with OAQPS. I believe - I misspoke earlier. I believe that there are six in New Orleans operating. And the Web site may currently show results from four and that there are six operating in Mississippi.

Matt Brown: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: I'm sorry, is this Matt with the Times Picayune?

Matt Brown: Yes.

Eryn Witcher: We will fast check that and get back to you.

Matt Brown: Okay. And one last question again regarding Murphy Oil, the timeline for the clean up. I realize it's the company's responsibility. But what is your alls understanding how long it's going to take before you're not telling people that they need to wear gloves, et cetera, to work on their houses, to even visit their houses?

Eryn Witcher: I'm afraid that's too premature. We're committed to continuing to do the sampling and working on the cleanup. But I think it's just too early for that. Does anyone else?

Matt Brown: How about a matter of weeks, months, a year, two years? I mean just to…

Eryn Witcher: Again…

Matt Brown: I realize you don't know the answer, but is there a guess?

Administrator: Again, this is the Administrator. Too premature as Richard Greene our Regional Administrator said. The area where we saw at least mild to moderate to severe oil contamination encompassed an area of approximately 1700 homes. So that's a large area that needs to be taken care of.

And so it's a large area. And we're going to oversee and make sure that Murphy Oil does this clean in an appropriate, environmentally and health appropriate way and whatever length of time that takes. So…

Matt Brown: Okay, and that was Mr. Johnson?

Stephen Johnson: Yes.

Matt Brown: Okay, thanks.

Operator: Your next question comes from Mike Keller with the Sun Herald.

Mike Keller: Hi. I understand that the EPA was - has been basically in the South Mississippi area using mobile air monitor, monitors for the pre-burning sites. And I'm wondering if any of that data, if you all have - anybody who looked

at any of that data, what it's shown or when that'll be made available to the public?

Eryn Witcher: I'm sorry, unfortunately I don't think you have the right experts on the call because we were doing the topics that we listed. But we don't have any other air data to…

Mike Keller: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: …at this time. But as soon as we get it, we will give it to the public as soon as we have it.

Mike Keller: Okay, I understood that that was - are they actually using mobile air monitors? I just kind of heard that.

Eryn Witcher: Region 4, can you help us out?

(Doug Nealy): This is (Doug Nealy) with the Monitoring Program. I'm not aware of any mobile monitor that we're using there. But as said earlier, we have three fixed sites and we are monitoring five of the burn sites. But none of them are mobile. They're all fixed sites.

Eryn Witcher: Any other questions?

Mike Keller: No, thank you.

Eryn Witcher: Great, thanks. Next.

Operator: Your next question comes from Amena Saiyid, with BNA.

Amena Saiyid: Yes hi. I wanted to find out something very basic. This question's for Administrator Johnson. You mentioned about the Mississippi site, the results, and you said that there was some portions or - there are few (exceedances) noticed of some compounds. Could you little - just talk a little bit about those, I mean give me a - which compounds, which sites, how - what's the size of the (something) et cetera, a few more - little more details?

Eryn Witcher: Okay, great. OAQPS and Region 4, can you help us out?

(Doug Nealy): (Doug Nealy) in Region 4 again. The two pollutants that we're talking about is acrolein. And we measure that at the Stennis Space Center site. And we had two days that were above our screening levels. And those samples are a 24 hour average.

Amena Saiyid: Okay.

(Doug Nealy): The other pollutant was formaldehyde and that was at our monitor in Pascagoula. And those were 24 hour averages. And they were also two days that were above the screening level.

Eryn Witcher: If you go to our Web site, we have all the information right there. We explain where these chemicals frequently come from. I think there's a lot of good information there.

Amena Saiyid: Right. And these are the water ones right, that you're telling me about? Not air.

Eryn Witcher: Air.

(Doug Nealy): Air.

Amena Saiyid: No, no. I was interested in the water ones.

Eryn Witcher: The Mississippi Water Study?

Amena Saiyid: Yes, yes.

Eryn Witcher: Region 4?

Scott Gordon: Yes. We - my name is Scott Gordon. I'm the Deputy Division Director for the Water Division.

The issues with surface water really resolved around dissolved (oxin) concentration (which causes) the organic matter in the water column. Again, our information is also on the Web site. It gets into the very specifics of the kind of analysis we ran as well as the location of that information.

Amena Saiyid: Well I looked at those. That's why I was trying to just get it and - in as simply as possible. This water is now would you say, Mississippi water is safe for fishing and swimming and all of that?

Eryn Witcher: The EPA continues to do sampling along with our partners. And the results from our latest study show that water is at a level that would be suitable for swimming.

Amena Saiyid: Okay.

Eryn Witcher: Thank you.

Operator: Your next question comes from Michael Dunne with the Baton Rouge Advocate.

Michael Dunne: Yes. Actually Cain started out by asking Administrator Johnson if this comment about whether or not this testing should - sort of disproves the idea that this was a gigantic environmental catastrophe and is the sampling really sufficient enough to tell us whether people - whether there is a danger out there or no danger out there?

Stephen Johnson: Well again, this is Administrator Johnson. This is a natural disaster none the like which we have seen before. And so this is an enormous disaster. And I've already mentioned the areas that we have continue concern.

What we have reported on, what we continue to report on is what we know. While I understand there's been a lot of speculation of it could have been or what people might have thought, we - what we have been continually reporting on is what we know. And what we knew from our early sampling and we did extensive sampling was the flood waters. And the flood waters were (emmunated) with a bacteria and lead and a variety of other materials.

Again what do we know? We have been testing sediment. Again we - as we did in the flood waters, we sought outside counsel from our Science Advisory Board, make sure that we were doing the scientifically appropriate sample, sampling both design and getting information. And so we did that also with sediment.

And on the sediment issue we're still continuing to monitor a number of the sediment areas, sediment in and around the (fail) site. We're looking at the sediment around Murphy Oil and in the Ninth Ward area. And so as we get

that information, we're doing exactly what we're doing today and sharing it with everybody.

Our state partners and federal partners to local officials to public at large. And so we're sharing everything, what we know and we're doing everything we can to make sure that the information that we're providing is scientifically sound and accurate.

Michael Dunne: Well I guess what I'm saying is okay we've got - you're sharing what you know. What does it tell you? Does it tell you that we've had a major disaster, we didn't have a major disaster? There's possible health harms or that for the most part it looks like that there's not any real concern for health?

Stephen Johnson: Yes, let me - certainly I can provide some additional information, additional comments. But Dr. Frumkin, why don't you go ahead?

Dr. Howard Frumkin: Yes, I'm going to urge you to reframe the question in your reporting. It's very hard to say in a broad brush way that there either is a disaster or there isn't a disaster. This is a very complex situation as the Administrator said.

There are some areas that appear to be clean and quite safe, areas about which we're very concerned -- (fail) area is one of them -- some areas about which we just don't have enough data yet and we're still collecting data and making evaluations.

One can't really (unintelligible) in one phrase or one sentence.

Michael Dunne: You mentioned a particular area that wasn't quite - that you felt might not be quite safe. Could you repeat that? I didn't hear it. It sounded like (Bell) or something like that.

Dr. Howard Frumkin: It's the Murphy Oil spill area in St. Bernard's parish. That's the area that I described earlier in the context of our recently released ACSCR report.

Eryn Witcher: Great. Thank you. Next question.

Operator: Your next question comes from Randy Loftis with the Dallas Morning News.

Randy Loftis: Hi. Thank you very much everybody. I'm just wondering if you could talk about the range of options that might be available to assure the long term health of the affected areas and which of those options seems most viable at this point?

Stephen Johnson: Well that's - this is the Administrator, EPA. That's obviously a question that we're asking ourselves. And the first answer to that is making sure that we're continuing to monitor. And we're continuing to monitor the air or continuing to look at the water or continuing to look at the sediment. And so that is certainly EPA, what EPA is doing.

ATSDR…

Dr. Howard Frumkin: What we're doing is looking at the same monitoring data that EPA's generating or collecting from other data collectors and doing analysis on the basis of long term exposure assumptions as well as short term exposure assumptions.

Over the long term we have to think about the special populations at risk such as children as well as the general population. And we'll be making evaluations over time together at EPA and with state authorities on what we think any excess risk levels may be.

Eryn Witcher: Great thanks. Next question.

Operator: Your next questions comes from Jeff Young with National Public Radio.

Jeff Young: Hi. I'm actually with the NPR show, Living on Earth. I have a question, a couple of questions pertaining to the Murphy Oil spill…

Eryn Witcher: Jeff, you know what? I'm sorry, we're going to lose this call in a couple minutes so I've got to ask you to do one question. Go ahead.

Jeff Young: When were the warnings and advisories on Murphy first issued? Where they issued in a fashion that people returning to the area would actually receive? Where there any personnel from your agencies actually in the affected areas saying, handing out flyers, posting signs with those warnings? Was there any guarantee that the consumer of the information would actually receive it?

Eryn Witcher: (LDC), do you want to talk about your fact sheet or do we have the wrong - I must (have) the right folks on the call for that.

Man: Richard, do you want to talk about the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital Services Fact Sheet?

Richard Greene: Well we are - we're currently counting in excess of 1.1 million items of information distributed in the New Orleans and South Louisiana area. And there's been several agencies that have been involved in that distribution of information. And as we have had the opportunity and the sufficient notice of where there have been returning communities and checkpoints, there has been distribution accomplished there as well as in neighborhood locations and neighborhood centers.

Day before yesterday I was at the big FEMA center. It's in the parking lot at the Wal-Mart there in (Shell Met) and confirm that our data together with that of the other several federal and state agencies is being distributed. That is a very likely location for people to show up. And not only can they get the printing material in a number of languages, but they also can talk to people and get answers to their questions and discuss their concerns.

So the effort to get information out and into the hands of the residents of that area has been a major effort. And it continues to be. We have tried to provide information through the media. Obviously all of the information that we have shared has also been posted on our Web site. However, we recognize there's a limit that people have to the access to the Web site. So we've tried to provide it in all these other manners that we have described. And I'm sure I'm missing some.

WWL radio I think has probably been our most frequent supporter in trying to get information out in the radio because a lot of people, especially in the early days, had access to radio when they didn't have electricity or television or computer access. So every way that we can think of and every way that has been suggested to us has been part of our initiative on distributing public information. And there's been not let up on that. We continue to modify and update our data and our distribution efforts.

We are going to add some additional folks to the community as these FEMA centers and even some volunteer centers are set up so that we can be sure that we are available and that our information is available in those locations as well.

So that's a - that's just kind of a summary of what we are doing.

Eryn Witcher: Thank you (Mayor). And I - Jeff, I know you're radio so you need a quick little sound byte so we're going to turn it over to the Administrator.

Stephen Johnson: Thanks. Our message, as soon as EPA got our first results from flood waters and then shortly thereafter settlements, our message has been very simple. We are concerned and avoid direct contact with the sediments. Avoid direct contact with the flood waters.

And so that has been our message from the very beginning as soon as we got our results from our sample analysis. And we have used that message. We've used all sources of media outlets from radio, from TV to flyers. And that applies to the sediments throughout the area including Murphy Oil.

Eryn Witcher: Thank you.

Stephen Johnson: And that's it.

Eryn Witcher: We have about 3 minutes and then we lose the conference call. So I think this might be the last question.

Operator: Your next question comes from Avery Palmer with Inside EPA.

Avery Palmer: Hi. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you're doing in terms of the disposal of the debris and how are you dealing with the possible air quality impacts from burning the debris?

Eryn Witcher: Avery I'm sorry, we really just have the experts on this call for the topics that we have released some recent sampling on. I don't want to have the wrong people. Do you have any specifics to today's call?

Avery Palmer: Sure. Sorry. A different question I had would be could you elaborate a little bit more, someone earlier mentioned these possible respiratory concerns. But we don't know exactly where they're coming from. At the same time, most of your air quality… look okay and not posing a big health threat.

What do you conclude from that? Are the possible respiratory concerns coming from air issues that aren't being measured in these samples?

Dr. Howard Frumkin: This is Dr. Frumkin speaking. The routine air pollution sampling doesn't' measure mold, doesn't' measure a number of other things as well. So it's possible that if there is an excess in respiratory symptoms -- that's an if, not yet verified -- and if it's related to environmental exposures -- and that's another if -- then it's possible that those exposures may be some unmeasured contaminants and mold would be a good candidate to be one of those.

Eryn Witcher: Before we warp this up, does LEDQ, do you have anything in general that you'd like to add?

(Chris Rovery): This is (Chris Rovery), the Administrator for Air Quality. Just one point of clarification. I think there's a little confusion about how much sampling's gone on in the New Orleans area. There's been a substantial amount of air quality sampling that has been going on over there. Actually we're working with EPA on 19 different site locations. And not all of those will sample at the same time. But there's going to be equipment deployed out there.

We've had the (toggle) unit. The trace atmospheric gas analyzer has been around Murphy analyzing their gathering data. So there's been an awful lot of information gathered in the New Orleans area, not just in Mississippi as might have been implied earlier.

Eryn Witcher: Great. Thank you so much for joining us today. We'll have the transcript available on the Web site.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for participating in today's EPA conference call. You may now disconnect.

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