

## NIEHS Continues Response to 2010 Gulf Oil Spill

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is part of the National Institutes of Health. From its home base in North Carolina, NIEHS has had a continuous presence in the Gulf region, protecting the health and safety of workers responding to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill; launching and enrolling participants in the GuLF STUDY, the largest study ever conducted on the possible health effects from an oil spill; and supporting Gulf region research efforts.

**GuLF STUDY** – In June 2010, the director of NIH, Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., asked NIEHS to lead a study on the health of the workers and volunteers most directly involved in responding to the oil spill crisis. NIEHS immediately began working with the Gulf communities, as well as agencies, researchers, and outside experts, to design the study. More than 32,000 people from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and other areas have enrolled in the study, but more are needed before enrollment closes in March 2013. The long-term health study will help determine if oil spills, and exposure to crude oil and dispersants, affect physical and mental health. Researchers are studying a range of problems, including breathing, skin conditions, self-reported symptoms, blood pressure, and cancer, as well as depression, stress, and anxiety.



**Toxicology Research** – NIEHS' National Toxicology Program obtained samples of the Deepwater Horizon crude oil and dispersants, and is conducting tests to better understand the chemistry, biological fate, and any potential toxicological effects. The NTP is using this analytical information to develop a toxicology research program on polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), chemicals that are naturally present in crude oil and also formed during the incomplete burning of gas, coal, garbage, or other organic substances.

**University-Community Partnerships** – NIEHS awarded \$25.2 million in research grants to Gulf area universities that partner with communities affected by the oil spill. This new research network is addressing health questions specifically identified by the communities in need. Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans; Tulane University, New Orleans; University of Florida, Gainesville; and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston are the five-year grant recipients. Each consortium team is conducting research to determine if there are potential harmful effects of the disaster on reproduction and birth outcomes, the cardiorespiratory system, and general health and well-being. Researchers are also looking at factors that influence individual and community resilience post-disaster, and determining the impact they may have on behavior and mental health of children and adults living in the Gulf region.

**Safety Training** – Within days of the explosion, staff from the NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program were on site to ensure cleanup workers were trained to protect their own health and safety while responding to the disaster. Approximately 150,000 workers were trained, using NIEHS-developed materials. Many of the trained workers are being invited to participate in the NIEHS-led GuLF STUDY. Additionally, NIEHS has teamed with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to evaluate the mental health impacts of environmental disasters on respondents and mental health care providers.

