

July 9, 2018

National Academies' Gulf Research Program and Sea Grant to Conduct Workshops Around the Country on Improving Regional Oil Spill Preparedness

WASHINGTON – The Gulf Research Program (GRP) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is collaborating with the Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program to convene a series of workshops aimed at improving community preparedness for future oil spills. The workshops, to be held in five regions around the United States, will bring together practitioners and stakeholders focusing on lessons learned about the health, social, and economic impacts of oil spills and identify regional needs and priorities for improving preparedness.

Since the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, attention has focused on the impacts of oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico region, and much has been learned about the public health effects, social disruption, and economic impacts of oil spills. Oil spills occur throughout the country, though, and different areas face different issues and concerns. These workshops aim to combine what is now known about oil spill impacts with the perspectives and experiences of people in five different coastal regions of the country: western Gulf of Mexico, eastern Gulf of Mexico, West Coast, mid-Atlantic, and Alaska.

“When an oil spill occurs, a lot of attention and effort goes toward the immediate needs of limiting damage to the environment and protecting people from threats to health and safety. However, what often gets less attention are the broader, longer-term impacts on communities,” said LeighAnne Olsen, director of strategic initiatives for the Gulf Research Program. “In 2017, the GRP sponsored a workshop on ways to improve protection of community health and well-being from oil spills. The opportunities identified in that workshop led to this collaboration with Sea Grant.”

“Our program focuses on synthesizing, translating, and delivering oil spill science to the audiences that can use it,” said Steve Sempier of the Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program. “While much of our initial work was concentrated on the Gulf of Mexico region, with these workshops we will partner with others in the national network of Sea Grant programs to both expand the conversation and tailor it to the diverse needs of coastal communities around the country that have been or could be impacted by oil spills.”

At least five regional workshops will occur between fall 2018 and winter 2019. The workshops will include representatives from the oil spill response and public health sectors, elected officials and community leaders, relevant industries and groups directly impacted by spills, social workers, scientists, and educators.

The workshops will produce regional and national research and outreach priorities, possible protocols to include in existing response and regulatory frameworks, pilot project ideas to address identified issues, and the foundations for increased regional capacities in oil spill preparedness for communities around the country.

The Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program will be partnering with Alaska Sea Grant, University of Southern California Sea Grant, and Virginia Sea Grant to carry out the workshops outside of the Gulf region.

The Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GoMRI) provides support to the Sea Grant programs of the Gulf of Mexico (Florida Sea Grant, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Louisiana Sea Grant, and Texas

Sea Grant) in an extension and outreach effort to increase the use of oil spill science by people whose livelihoods depend on a healthy Gulf. The Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program is part of the National Sea Grant College Program network. For over 50 years, Sea Grant has supported coastal communities through research, extension, and education. For more information about the Sea Grant Oil Spill Science Outreach Program, visit www.gulfseagrant.org/oilspilloutreach.

The National Academies' Gulf Research Program is an independent, science-based program founded in 2013 as part of legal settlements with the companies involved in the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* disaster. It seeks to enhance offshore energy system safety and protect human health and the environment by catalyzing advances in science, practice, and capacity to generate long-term benefits for the Gulf of Mexico region and the nation. The program has \$500 million for use over 30 years to fund grants, fellowships, and other activities in the areas of research and development, education and training, and monitoring and synthesis. Visit www.national-academies.org/gulf to learn more.

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