



Just the Facts... Hurricane Katrina Oil Exposure Information

If you were part of the Hurricane Katrina response effort near the Murphy Oil Facility, you may have come into contact with oil and oil contaminated water and debris. Health effects from exposure to oil and oil contaminated media depend on many factors. These include the types of chemical compounds in the oil, how long the exposure lasts, and the amount of these chemicals contacted.

In order to protect your self, you should avoid entering areas with oil contamination and seek medical attention immediately if you believe you are experiencing health effects due to oil exposure. If you will continue working in this area, you should only work in those areas identified by the command and follow the safety and health procedures identified by your chain of command.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Q: If I was exposed to oil, what are the potential short-term health effects from my exposure? Is there any health risk from smelling oil odors at a distance if I never came into contact with oil at all?

A: If you believe you are experiencing any adverse health effects due to exposure to oil, you should seek medical attention immediately. For those who may have been in contact with oil for short periods of time and then showered shortly thereafter, and are not experiencing skin irritation, headache or nausea at the time, it is unlikely they will experience health effects at all. Symptoms should have been short-lived. Those in direct contact with oil would likely have had a “mixed exposure,” meaning they may have gotten oil on their skin and clothing, as well as inhaled fumes at close range. The most likely effects of this “mixed” direct exposure would include:

- headache
- dizziness or lightheadedness
- possibly mild nausea or vomiting
- redness, rash or blisters where skin came into direct contact with the oil

Individuals who smelled oil from a distance without direct skin or clothing contact may also have experienced headaches or mild nausea. Those with pre-existing respiratory problems may have experienced some breathing problems.

Q: What are the potential long-term effects of this kind of exposure?

A: For those who might have come into contact with oil for short periods of time, may have felt light-headed or nauseous which should subside within a day. Skin irritation may last a little longer, and it is important to avoid getting infections in irritated skin. We know this because there is a great deal of information from workers in the oil industry in many settings, and if immediate health effects are not noted, it is unlikely that any long-term effects would occur.

Q: What kind of medical follow-up will be done to ensure there has not been any permanent health effect?

A. Individuals who complain of nausea or headache should be removed from any area where the smell of oil or fumes is present. These symptoms should subside. If the skin has been in contact, washing with soap and water to ensure that the oil is removed is important. Some components of the oil may have been absorbed through the skin, but based on the information gathered from workers in the oil industry; it is unlikely that this would pose any long-term health risk if the oil is removed as soon as possible. If redness or irritation occurs, medical providers may be able to provide topical treatment if needed. It is important to be careful not to further irritate the skin or cause breaks in the skin, which may be a source of entry for infection from contaminated water. Unless skin irritation does not get better, any individuals with the symptoms discussed above do not need further medical follow-up.

For more information, contact:

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)

Phone: (800) 222-9698 <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/>

DOD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)

Phone: (866) 559-1627 <http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)

Phone: (888) 232-3764 <http://www.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>

Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)

Phone: (757) 953-0700 <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

Phone: (404) 498-0110 <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/>