



## June is National Safety Month

June 2010

Not too late...at least, not yet.

There is an on-going environmental event of huge proportions in the Gulf of Mexico. And, while the environmental impact will no doubt be of great magnitude for some time, the event is in process are so that prevention actions are of no meaning. However, if history teaches us anything it is that we can anticipate another great event that has the potential to create a huge damaging impact on human lives...that is, the injuries and illnesses which will happen to those individuals who are engaged in cleaning and managing these environmental conditions.

When the crude oil tanker EXXON Valdez spilled 10 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound in Alaska, about 11,000 people were directly involved in the clean up activities. NIOSH conducted a study of the safety conditions at the time of the clean up and reported lagging indicators of the accident and injury occurrences. It was reported that over 16% of those involved in the clean-up process suffered injury or illness; almost 2,000 people. By way of comparison, the State of Indiana reported that the total accident and injury rate for all construction work in Indiana to be 5.4 in 2006. This is above the national average but still about 300% lower than the oil clean-up rates reported.

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City necessitated massive clean-up efforts. Many safety professionals recall that most of the OSHA performance standards for demolition activities were simply suspended during some phases of this work. Today the number of injuries and illnesses generated from this approach is in the thousands.

Safety management in quick response catastrophic recovery/clean up activity is well documented in several NIOSH reports. The approach is simple, powerful and straightforward to implement. General directives are as follows:

1. Train people on awareness of hazards.
2. Provide appropriate personal protective equipment.
3. Decontaminate appropriately.
4. Manage exposures...provide direct and empowered safety supervision to ensure conformance to equipment and procedural protocols.

As the National Safety Awareness Month of June 2010, the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill clean-up efforts are not fully organized and implemented. It is too late to stop the total environmental impact. It is not too late to protect the lives of the people involved in the management and clean-up process, at least... not yet. At some point it will be.



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### Newsletter Spotlight

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