

Responding to the Gulf Oil Spill: A Herculean Task

Stephen J. Phillippe Sr, BS, LEM, EMT-P, Deputy Director, Emergency Response,
Louisiana Bureau of Emergency Medical Services

During the late-night hours of April 20, 2010, an oil-drilling rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion resulted in 11 deaths and 17 injuries and set in motion 1 of the nation's largest response efforts to what would become known as the worst environmental disaster in the history of the United States—the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Although we may never be certain of the total impact of the oil spill, it was estimated that approximately 50 000 to 60 000 barrels of oil per day leaked from the site and into the Gulf of Mexico, causing an unprecedented environmental impact. By June 21, it was estimated that the impact of the oil spill forced the closure of 86 985 mi² of coastal waters, or approximately 36% of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, which extended along the coast from Atchafalaya Bay, Louisiana, to Panama City, Florida.

A medical impact was also felt, and as of June 21, 143 oil spill exposure-related cases had been reported to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, with 108 of those cases involving workers in the oil spill cleanup efforts and the remainder reported by the public.

The cover photograph depicts several of the many thousands of workers contracted by BP to clean up oil near Port Fourchon, Louisiana, on June 25, 2010.

Have your photograph of a disaster event/response effort considered for the cover of *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*. See the Instructions for Authors at the back of the issue or www.dmphp.org for details.

