



MISSISSIPPI EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
NEWS RELEASE
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Coast Watch Volunteer Program Launched for Mississippi Coast

Biloxi, Miss – The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service today announced the launch of Coast Watch, a volunteer initiative focusing on surveying beaches and coastal habitats that may be impacted by the BP oil spill. Coast Watch volunteers survey, record, and report shoreline observations along approximately 46 miles of beach in Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties.

“Coast Watch is the first line of defense for coastal communities facing possible oil impact,” said Brandi McNeil, MCVS Deputy Director. “Volunteers in the Coast Watch program play an extremely important role in the oil spill response because they are the most familiar with the beaches and wildlife in their community.”

Individuals who live along coastal communities can watch for oiled wildlife, vegetation, and beaches by becoming a Coast Watch volunteer. Coast Watch volunteers are community members who know the daily wildlife and plants that exist on their local beach. The “Coast Watchers” will assist state agencies, BP, and their partnering organizations in identifying beaches that need attention.

Coast Watchers will work within the coastal communities where they live and commit to do the following:

- Report **injured** or **oiled animals**
- Report **oiled shoreline**
- Report a change in **Air Quality**

Coast Watchers are **not permitted** to enter off-limit areas to obtain observations and must not make contact with oiled wildlife, vegetation, and beaches due the health concerns associated with contact.

Citizens wanting to become a Coast Watcher need to register online at www.volunteermisississippi.org. Training will be offered on an ongoing basis and be provided to all individuals participating in volunteer activities.

“MCVS is offering a valuable service to the coastal communities and an avenue for the many volunteers who want to participate in response efforts,” said Marti Powers, BP spokesperson. “We appreciate the opportunity to partner with MCVS to provide this assistance to Mississippi.”

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To date, over 4,000 volunteers from 46 states, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Singapore, Canada, and Australia have registered to help in response to the BP oil spill. Hundreds of volunteers from Mississippi's lower three counties have given almost 1,000 hours of service, and cleaned and surveyed over 37 miles of beach and coastal habitats.

The Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service engages and supports Mississippians of all ages and backgrounds in service to their communities. As your state office of volunteerism, the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service administers AmeriCorps programs, supports a network of Volunteer Centers, and coordinates other initiatives fostering community engagement and building volunteer capacity throughout the state. Contact MCVS at 888.353.1793 or www.mcv.org.

For questions, call 866-519-MEMA (6362), or visit us online at www.msema.org. You can also follow us on Twitter and Facebook using the keyword MSEMA.

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