

Social Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on Coastal Communities along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico

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The Deepwater Horizon disaster has had widespread environmental, health, economic, and social effects on individuals, households, communities, and the entire Gulf Coast region. While some of those effects were short-lived, others persist. This study, focused in five coastal communities, identified the range of oil spill effects present between 2013 and 2015, placing them in a broad social, economic, and environmental context. Because of the unique history and composition of each community, these impacts varied greatly, both within and between communities. This then served to intensify or create inequalities. Even at the end of the study period, across the study communities, multi-faceted uncertainties persisted about the nature, extent, and duration of impacts from the spill. Key topics of concern were ongoing uncertainties about the health and environmental impacts of the oil, how restoration monies would be spent, and how both would affect communities and livelihoods. These concerns were exacerbated by conflicting, unclear, or untrusted results of scientific studies and actions related to legal settlements and claims processes that kept the spill in people's minds. In combination with economic and environmental concerns unrelated to the spill, these persistent uncertainties were also identified as contributing to continuing anxieties.