



PRESS RELEASE

MONROE COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Several environmental remediation firms have been marketing protective measures to Keys businesses and residences in the event impacts from the Transocean/BP Gulf oil spill reach the Florida Keys.

Officials from the Unified Command, including the U.S. Coast Guard, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Monroe County Emergency Management, are discouraging the private sector from contracting with private vendors for the deployment of protective devices, especially oil containment booms.

“Right now, there are no near-term impact risks for the Florida Keys,” said Captain Pat DeQuattro, Sector Key West commander, who administers the Unified Command in the Keys. “But if we get impacts, science tells us they are likely to be in the form of tar balls.

“Booms are not effective measures to protect shorelines and beaches against tar balls,” said DeQuattro, adding that because tar balls are almost always neutral buoyant they can easily slip beneath containment booms.

“We’re learning from other regions in the Gulf of Mexico that while booms work well for fresh oil in the water, they have very limited value once the oil has weathered,” he said. “Given that impacts that might affect the Keys would be of a weathered nature, booming is likely to be more harmful than helpful to the environment.

According to DEP officials, boom installation must be authorized by the DEP, Army Corps of Engineers and the Unified Command.

Officials also cited other challenges with boom usage, including maritime navigation; their need for continual maintenance and, without appropriate permits, that their costs would likely not be reimbursed by BP.

Effective tar ball mitigation on beaches and shorelines, according to DeQuattro, is hand retrieval, and the Unified Command has confirmed that BP has contracted with the National Response Corporation with up to 300 trained personnel ready to respond, if needed. Additional resources would be called in if required and that might include mechanical systems to scoop up tar balls before they reach nearshore waters.

Questions regarding private booming and other mitigation efforts can be directed to Coast Guard Sector Key West at 305-292-8872.

