

# 2010 Gulf Oil Spill Dispersants Quick Facts



## Dispersants Quick Facts for Coastal Residents

- Dispersants are chemicals used to break up oil
- It is unlikely visitors and people living in coastal areas will come in contact with dispersants
- Health risks to Gulf Oil Spill response workers are listed below and on the Information for Workers Fact Sheet: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010/>

## Dispersants Facts

- Oil spill dispersants are chemicals put directly on the spilled oil
- Dispersants break an oil slick into small oil drops and stop the oil from making a new oil slick
- Dispersants make it easier for nature to weather and break down the oil
- Broken down oil is less likely to stick to animals, rocks, and plants

## Dispersants and your health

- It is normal to be worried about getting sick from contact with dispersants used on oil spills. The facts are:
- Most people in coastal areas are not coming in direct contact with oil spill dispersants
- Brief contact with a small amount of dispersants should not harm you
- Long term, repeated exposure to dispersants is unlikely. The health impact has not been studied.

### If you are a visitor or are living in the Gulf shore area and not officially part of the response and cleanup activities

- Stay away from cleanup activities
- Follow health and safety advice or warnings from state or local government officials

## Response Worker safety facts

If you are working on the oil spill in the Gulf and come in direct contact with unmixed dispersants on exposed skin, (dispersants that have not been mixed with water, oil or land) you should follow these steps:

- Unmixed dispersant is a pale, amber liquid. It floats on water, evaporates slowly and over time it dissolves on contact with water.
- If you get dispersants on your skin, wash it off right away with soap and water
- If you breathe in dispersants, move to an area where the air is clearer
- If you get dispersants in your eyes, rinse your eyes with water for 15 minutes
- Oil spill workers should read "Information for Response Workers." <http://emergency.cdc.gov/gulfoilspill2010/>
- If you think you have been exposed to unmixed dispersants; call the Poison Help Hotline: 1-800-222-1222

Avoid any contact with unmixed dispersants.

If you swallow unmixed dispersants:

- Do not try to vomit. This is not recommended and may cause more harm.
- Wash out your mouth with water
- If you think you have been exposed to dispersants; call the Poison Help Hotline: 1-800-222-1222

## How to judge your risk from unmixed dispersants contact

The more you are in direct contact with unmixed dispersants, your chances of getting sick are increased. Five things that control your health risk if you come in contact with dispersants are:

- How many times you are in contact with dispersants
- How long you are in contact with dispersants
- How much dispersants you come in contact with
- How much water has been mixed with dispersants
- The way you come in contact with dispersants (eyes or skin contact, breathing or swallowing it)



ATSDR

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

## Signs of unmixed dispersants contact and illness

If you do come in contact with unmixed dispersants, possible signs of contact and illness are:

- Rash and dry skin from unmixed dispersants left on the skin
- Dry and irritated eyes if dispersants blow or splash into the eyes
- Irritated nose, throat, and lungs if workers breathe in dispersants for a long time or several times
- Upset stomach, vomiting, and diarrhea if dispersants are swallowed

More contact with unmixed dispersants may cause other health problems that include:

- A metallic taste in your mouth
- Your liver and kidneys may not work as well as they should
- Passing out and in rare serious cases, going into a coma
- **See your doctor if you are feel dispersants have made you sick or call the EPA Deepwater Horizon Medical Support Line for help: 1-888-623-0287**
- **If you think you have been exposed to dispersants; call the Poison Help Hotline: 1-800-222-1222**

## The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tests results

The EPA is testing air and waters for dispersants daily along the Gulf shoreline and will put results on its website at: <http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/>

### Chemicals found in dispersants include

- 1,2-Propanediol
- Ethanol, 2-butoxy-\*
- Butanedioic acid, 2-sulfo-, 1,4-bis(2-ethylhexyl) ester, sodium salt (1:1)
- Sorbitan, mono-(9Z)-9-octadecenoate
- Sorbitan, mono-(9Z)-9-octadecenoate, poly(oxy-1,2-ethanediyl) derivs
- Sorbitan, tri-(9Z)-9-octadecenoate, poly(oxy-1,2-ethanediyl) derivs
- 2-Propanol, 1-(2-butoxy-1-methylethoxy)
- Distillates (petroleum), hydrotreated light

\*Note: This chemical (Ethanol, 2-butoxy-) is not included in Corexit 9500.

For more information about chemicals found in dispersants: <http://www.epa.gov/bpspill/dispersants.html>

