Health Hazard Evaluation of Deepwater Horizon Response Workers

On May 28, 2010, BP requested a health hazard evaluation of Deepwater Horizon Response workers. The third in a series of interim reports from this health hazard evaluation was issued July 22, 2010. Below is a summary of the main findings and recommendations from this report.

PBZ and area air concentrations of the contaminants measured during an oil skimming mission aboard the M/V Queen Bee on June 14-16, 2010 were below occupational exposure limits. No workers reported acute health symptoms. NIOSH observed the potential for skin contact with oil while placing and removing the skimmer and boom from the water and during cleaning activities on deck. NIOSH investigators observed that workers wore appropriate protective equipment.

NIOSH recommended continued use of eye protection, coveralls, rubber chemical boots, hard hats, and nitrile gloves for those on the deck during oil skimming operations with greater potential for dermal contact. Ear muffs should be worn when working on or near the high volume pumping unit. NIOSH also recommended continued attention to preventing heat-related illness.

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PBZ and area air concentrations of the compounds measured during an oil dispersant mission aboard the M/V International Peace on June 21-22, 2010 were all well below occupational exposure limits. Higher concentrations of propylene glycol, dipropylene glycol butyl ether, and 2-butoxyethanol were measured on workers involved in dispersant spraying than on workers involved in water sampling, suggesting that dispersant spraying was the source of these low exposures.

The highest concentrations of other volatile organic compounds were found inside the vessel cabin. The presence of these substances may be a result of contaminants in building materials, furnishings, and cleaning products. Because of the potential for inhalation and dermal contact with the dispersant, NIOSH recommended continuing the practice of keeping non-essential personnel inside the cabin during dispersant spray operations and using respiratory protection, eye protection, coveralls, and gloves for those on the deck during dispersant spraying.

Personnel conducting fluorometry and water sampling and preparing for dispersion should continue to wear cloth coveralls, eye protection, and nitrile gloves when handling items or samples potentially contaminated with oil or dispersant. NIOSH also recommended continued attention to preventing heat-related illness. For these and other NIOSH health hazard evaluations, results may not reflect conditions on a continual basis.

To read Interim Report #3 and view updates on this health hazard evaluation visit **http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/oilspillresponse/gulfspillhhe.html.**