



Human Communities: Disaster Management, Sustainability and Health

LuAnn E. White, PhD, DABT
Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

November 1, 2010



Research Questions

- Louisiana Universities developed a collaborative research agenda for the Gulf Oil Spill
 - Health and Society was one of three areas
- Research Questions developed from projects and capabilities submitted by investigators



Health Research Question 1

- **What is the impact of the oil spill on the health of affected populations, including the on-the-ground workforce and the community at large?**
-
- The approach to this question is a systematic assessment of contaminants in environmental media, exposure pathways and associated health outcomes using both the National Research Council risk analysis model and direct human health monitoring and surveillance.



Health Research Question 2

- **What are the most effective public health approaches to post-disaster mental health services among diverse population groups in oil spill impacted communities?**
- Research on disasters has shown that mental health from these events are substantial and can persist over the long term. A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies is necessary to assess the mental health and subsequent stress-related physiological impacts of this disaster as well as access to and utilization of support services.



Health Research Question 3

- **How and what do individuals learn about disasters?**
- The Gulf oil spill is a technological disaster and has the potential to be very disruptive of coastal Louisiana communities. Understanding how communities respond to various sources of information -- from the media, from NGOs, from various officials -- is critical to allow early response to the emergence of potentially disruptive forces in a community and to stimulate resiliency.



Health Research Question 4

- **What factors contribute to community resilience and long-term sustainability in Louisiana Gulf Coast communities affected by the oil spill?**
- The communities impacted by the Gulf oil spill have deep roots, a close relationship to the environment, and a unique way of life. The communities have a complex environmental relationship with fishing and shrimping, and also relies on the petroleum industry. Studies are needed to characterize the impact of the spill on these communities.



Significance

- The Gulf Oil Spill provides an opportunity to more fully study the impact of oil on local populations and workers. The unknown nature of possible health effects contributes to the anxiety and uncertainty of communities exacerbating mental health issues associated with the financial and traumatic impact of the incident.