Press Release
Institute for Marine Mammal Studies
May 12, 2010

Comments from Dr. Moby Solangi:

Turtle Deaths

A total of 66 sea turtles have been recovered from the beaches of Mississippi. The most common sea turtle species found was the Kemp's Ridley and all of the turtles were in various stages of decomposition. We are still awaiting results of the necropsies performed on stranded turtles. Samples have been sent off for further testing. Initial findings do not indicate that the deaths are oil spill related but this has not been ruled out at this time.

Dolphins found on May 10th, 2010

A dolphin carcass was found on Horn Island off the coast of Mississippi on Monday May 10th, 2010. The dolphin was an adult and was severely decomposed. A park ranger confirmed that the dolphin stranded on the island before the oil spill occurred; therefore, the dolphin's death was not caused by the Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill.

Another dolphin carcass was in Mobile Bay, Alabama. This dolphin was also an adult and was very decomposed. There were no obvious signs of oil present. Samples were taken for further analysis.

Short term effects to sea turtles and marine mammals

Marine mammals are adversely affected by exposure to oil and other harmful chemicals in their environment. Dolphins have very delicate skin and when dolphins come in contact with the oil, their skin will be affected. Their mucus membranes will also be affected. This includes their eyes and the blowhole which is where they breathe air. The oil can coat the blowhole and any fumes in the air can be inhaled by the dolphin. Dolphins take in a large amount of air when they surface and then hold their breath for several minutes at a time. This allows the fumes to enter the blood stream and affect internal organs like their brain, liver, kidneys, heart, and lungs. Dolphins can also be exposed to oil through eating prey that have consumed or absorbed the chemicals into their bodies. The amount of damage caused is determined by the concentration of chemicals inhaled or ingested and the duration of exposure to the oil. Sea Turtles can also be affected by exposure to oil in similar ways. Oil or chemicals can enter their bodies through inhalation and ingestion and can affect their eyes and other sensitive areas.

Long term effects of oil and dispersants used

Any chemicals that are in the water column or bottom sediments can be absorbed or ingested by organisms at the bottom of the food chain such as algae and marine plants. Other organisms eat the algae and plants and the chemical moves up the food chain. Organisms at the top of the food chain will accumulate higher levels of the chemical. It takes time for this accumulation to occur. This is why we may see impacts of the spill much later on.