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Waste Management



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Video Shows Mississippi Coastal Cleanup Volunteers How to Safely Remove Debris While Protecting Important Habitat

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and the Mississippi Marine Debris Task Force want everyone to have a safe and fun time at this year's Mississippi Coastal Cleanup on Saturday, Oct. 16, 2010. This year's cleanup will focus on inland areas and waterways instead of the beaches and barrier islands. This means volunteers will be trekking through areas never before included in the Mississippi cleanup. Many of these areas may have sensitive habitat and may be best reached by kayak or canoe. With this in mind, Task Force member Stacy Speas with Gulf Islands National Seashore, along with other Task Force members and videographer Mozart Dedeaux with the Pascagoula River Audubon Center, created a video to offer tips for volunteer safety as well as protection of the Mississippi Gulf Coast's valuable local resources.

The video can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPpLagFQy-w and on the Mississippi Coastal Cleanup Web site at www.mscoastalcleanup.org.

"The video is designed to not only be relevant to the Mississippi Coastal Cleanup, but for any cleanup, whether a volunteer group effort or an individual endeavor," Speas said.

When cleaning the waterways and surrounding areas, the goal is to remove marine debris, which consists of man-made items only. Natural debris such as driftwood and vegetation play an important role. This material creates the wrack. The wrack line indicates where the tide reaches its highest point and may consist of marsh grasses, sargassum (seaweed) and tiny animals. Left alone, sand may accumulate on top of the wrack, allowing plants to take hold and eventually forming a dune. The wrack also provides a food source for many animals, particularly shorebirds.

Ideally, marshes and bayous should be cleaned from a small boat, using a reaching tool. Animals use tall grasses to camouflage themselves or nesting areas. The grasses themselves can often be sharp. Walking in marshy areas can cause you to lose a shoe or could cause erosion, and damage in these fragile areas could take a season or more to repair naturally.

"You should ask yourself, 'Is it worth it to get this piece of trash?'" Speas said. "Will I do more harm than good?"

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Personal safety should always be a high priority when volunteering for the Mississippi Coastal Cleanup. Of specific concern in unpopulated and secluded areas is the presence of possible portable meth labs. Things to look for include a plastic container or jug containing plastic tubing through the cap, containers containing a foreign substance or material other than what the label may read, plastic bags, coffee filters, battery casings and camp fuel cans. When encountering possible portable meth labs, do not touch anything due to the combustible nature of the ingredients. As an overall safety measure, do not open any containers or smell their contents. Be sure to inform your site captain if you find anything suspicious and/or contact the drug enforcement agency in your county.

Volunteers should bring the following items with them to the cleanup:

- Plenty of water – stay hydrated.
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Sneakers or closed-toe shoes
- Work and/or rubber gloves
- Insect repellent

Volunteers should follow these precautions to ensure a safe cleanup:

- If cleaning by boat, wear a life jacket.
- Only pick up what you can see well. Animals or sharp objects can hide in tall grasses.
- Don't try to move something that is too heavy for you to lift comfortably.
- Stay away from large drums or buckets. Report their location to your cleanup site captain, or if you are boating on the waterway, try to note the GPS coordinates in order to report the location later.
- Wear gloves to collect debris.
- Be careful of glass, syringes or other sharp objects.
- Stay out of dune areas.
- Avoid stepping on beach grasses.
- Report entangled animals to your site captain. Do not try to disentangle the animal yourself. This could result in an injury to you or worsening the animal's condition.

The Mississippi Coastal Cleanup can be found online at www.mscoastalcleanup.org, or follow on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Mississippi-Coastal-Cleanup/119348171071 and Twitter at www.twitter.com/mscoastcleanup.

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The Mississippi Coastal Cleanup's planning committee, the Mississippi Marine Debris Task Force, is made up of representatives from Ashman & Son, LLC Contractors; Chevron Pascagoula Refinery; City of Biloxi; City of Gulfport; City of Moss Point; City of Ocean Springs; City of Pascagoula; Coastal Rivers; Delbert Hosemann Secretary of State; DMR Marine Patrol; Eco-Tours of South Mississippi; Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; Gulf Islands National Seashore; Hancock County Beautification Committee; Hancock County Board of Supervisors; Hancock County Chamber of Commerce; Hancock County Solid Waste; Harrison County Beautification Commission; Harrison County Board of Supervisors; Harrison County Sand Beach Department; Harrison County Sheriff's Department; Harrison County Utility Authority; Heritage Trails Partnership; Jackson County Board of Supervisors; Jackson County Chamber of Commerce; Jackson County Solid Waste Department; Jackson County 4-H Club; Keep Mississippi Beautiful; Keesler Air Force Base; Mississippi Air National Guard CRTG-Gulfport; Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium; Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service; Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; Mississippi Department of Marine Resources; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; Mississippi Power; Mississippi State University Coastal Research & Extension Center; Naval Construction Battalion Center; North Gulfport Community Land Trust; Office of Congressman Gene Taylor; Renew Our Rivers, Rotary International District 6840; Sea Coast Echo; University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Coast Research Laboratory; and Waste Management.

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The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.