

Researcher studies health effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill

August 25 2011

More than a year after the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill devastated coastal communities in Louisiana, there are still sections of oiled coastlines, livelihoods hanging in the balance and many lingering questions about the long-term impacts of the disaster. One concern in particular haunts those affected: can their community bounce back from such a terrible blow? An LSU researcher has teamed up with a multi-institutional group to determine how disaster-impacted communities fight back from the brink of collapse.

Craig Colten, Carl O. Sauer Professor of Geography at LSU, is part of a multi-university team that will be researching health effects of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Funded by the National Institute of [Environmental Health Sciences](#), or NIEHS, a division of the National Institutes of Health, the five-year project will receive more than \$25 million. Colten will be working most directly with researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston.

"The blowout in the Gulf last year has been referred to as the greatest environmental calamity in our country's history, yet there were two spills off the [Louisiana coast](#) in the late 1970s that were the largest U.S. spills up to that point in time," Colten said. "Fishermen and their families, oilfield workers and businesses in the [coastal communities](#) are no strangers to historic oil spills, to say nothing of the more frequent impacts from hurricanes."

Colten, a historical geographer, will head up a team seeking to identify

traditional elements of resilience that have enabled coastal communities to endure and recover from disruptive events over the past century. His work will trace historical responses to hurricanes, floods, [economic turmoil](#) and previous oil spills.

"We will seek to identify the many ways these resilient folks managed to rebound and adapt to disruptions," he said. "Sometimes solutions are well known to experienced local residents with generations of experience in coping with irregular, but not unexpected, traumatic events."

In the course of this research, he will identify social capacities that have enabled coastal societies to cope with disruptions and to bounce back after previous calamities. Mechanisms used to cope and recover that derive from tradition and not government programs are vitally important to the mental and public health of a community, but have been overlooked in other studies.

The ultimate objective is to work with a community outreach team and to help strengthen regional capacity to deal with future [oil spills](#) and other disruptions by restoring and strengthening traditional elements of resilience.

Provided by Louisiana State University

Citation: Researcher studies health effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2011, August 25) retrieved 22 September 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2011-08-health-effects-deepwater-horizon-oil.html>

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