Good news plus lingering concerns for Deepwater Horizon cleanup workers

September 14 2011

Several new studies of air and water near the site of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill conclude that cleanup workers may have escaped harm from one of the most worrisome groups of potentially toxic substances in the oil, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (CEN), ACS's weekly news magazine. But it cites concerns that another group of potentially harmful chemicals did escape from the water and could create a health hazard for cleanup workers.

The article, by C&EN Senior Editor Elizabeth Wilson, describes research showing that benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene — collectively termed BTEX — remained dissolved in the Gulf of Mexico, and did not vaporize into the air where they could be inhaled by cleanup workers. The spill began on July 20, 2010 with an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon facility, 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana, killing 11 oil workers. By the time the well was capped 87 days later, 4.9 million barrels (206 million gallons) of oil had spilled.

Tempering that apparent good news for the health of cleanup workers, however, are concerns that other substance released by the crude oil, substances that do not dissolve as well in water, die become airborne during the 2010 disaster. If so, they could pose a health threat to cleanup workers, the article notes.

More information: "Hyrdocarbons at Gulf Spill Surface" is available at pubs.acs.org/cen/science/89/8937sci3.html

Provided by American Chemical Society