

## **Why does the spillway get opened at all?**

The Bonnet Carré Spillway is a flood control structure. It is opened as a means to reduce flooding and levee stress in downstream communities. The Mississippi River flow at New Orleans is continuously monitored. When there are high rains or years of heavy snow melt, the flow rate can increase. The spillway is opened to keep the flow from exceeding 1.25 million cubic feet per second. Although the spillway bays are opened by Army Corps of Engineers, the decision whether or not to open is made by the Mississippi River Commission president.

## **What happens when it opens?**

When the spillway opens, the Mississippi River water is allowed to flow into Lake Pontchartrain, which then feeds into Lake Borgne. This water then has the freedom to move into the Mississippi Sound. The first thing that is noticed is a lowered salinity and an increase in the turbidity (sediment suspension) of the water. How this freshwater impacts the environment and its inhabitants is not well known in the Sound. Freshwater intrusion is a natural phenomenon that occurs in the region, however, exceptionally high volume increases may result in elevated impacts relative to normal conditions.

## **What does it do to oysters?**

The oysters of the Sound need a saline environment to survive. Since these oysters cannot move away from the spillway's high volume release of fresh water into the Mississippi Sound, there is potential for high oyster mortalities.

## **What does it do to shrimp?**

The influx of freshwater into the Sound may flush juvenile shrimp out of marsh and nearshore Sound systems and into more saline waters. This displacement would affect recruitment into the shrimp fishery and ultimately negatively impact the harvest.

## **Is it killing dolphins?**

The recent reports of dolphin mortalities are being thoroughly investigated to understand the potential relationship between the spillway opening and the mortalities. Local and regional circulation patterns are being assessed to better evaluate potential areas of mortality.

## **Is the local seafood still safe to eat?**

Investigating the safety of local seafood for human consumption is the responsibility of government agencies for human health and safety.

## **Can this hurt people if they get in the water?**

The monitoring of the health of the water as related to humans is continuously monitored by government agencies for human health and safety. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality routinely samples coastal waters along Mississippi's beaches.

## **How far can the impact reach?**

Geographically, the freshwater discharge can affect all Mississippi coastal waters.