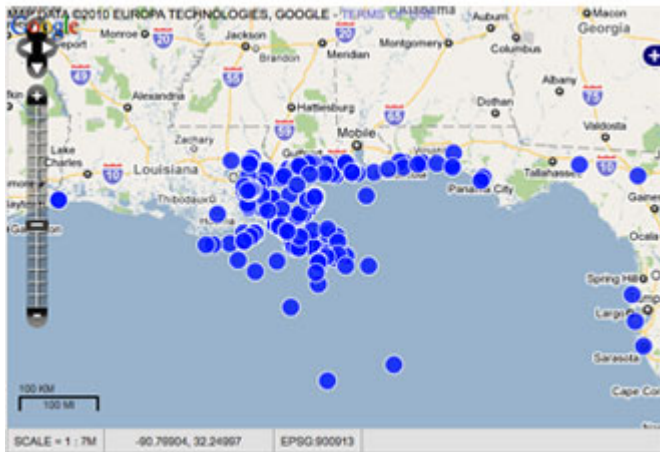


Students Mapping the Oil Spill

May 20, 2010 11:15 AM Kathryn Hobgood Ray
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Tapping into the power of the people and social media, students at Tulane University are helping the Louisiana Bucket Brigade monitor the effects of and the response to the massive Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.



This online Oil Spill Crisis Map tracks both the impact of and the response to the crisis in the Gulf of Mexico with reports from ordinary citizens. (Image from the Louisiana Bucket Brigade)

Using his or her cell phone, ordinary citizens immediately can report sightings of oiled birds, tar balls, broken oil containment booms or odors — alerting officials and the public alike of the extent of the damage.

Students in Nathan Morrow's Geographic Information Systems class already were using open source software to develop a system for reporting environmental hazards when the BP-operated drilling rig exploded on April 20.

Morrow, an adjunct assistant professor with the [Payson Center for International Development](#), and his class partnered with several other groups of students in a Research Methods class taught by Nancy Mock, Louisiana Bucket Brigade staff and California-based Radical Designs to quickly configure technology and methodology and create the [Oil Spill Crisis Map](#).

"We can actually apply this crisis map technology to the oil spill and generate real citizen-provided data on the effects and response," said Mock, who is co-director at the Tulane [Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy](#) and interim executive director of the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women at the Newcomb College Institute. With this system, she said, "we are putting in the hands of the affected people the ability to report in real time."

Coastal residents and people elsewhere with relevant information can use the tool. Even sightings of workers in Hazmat suits, job loss and symptoms of depression are things a citizen reporter might submit, in addition to environmental effects.

Organizations responding to the crisis are urged to submit their contact information and a brief description of what they are doing, said Mock.

Mobile phone users can text reports to (504) 27 27 OIL. Reports also can be sent to bspillmap@gmail.com and through Twitter with the hashtag #BPspillmap. The reports will appear on the web-based map.