

Oil Spill Puts Women's Health in Peril?

July 07, 2011 12:00 PM Keith Brannon
kbrannon@tulane.edu

Dr. Maureen Lichtveld of the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine will lead a five-year study to explore the potential health impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster on pregnant women and women of reproductive age living in Louisiana's coastal parishes. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has awarded a \$6.5 million grant for the study.



Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, chair of environmental policy, will lead the first long-term study to examine the effects of a major oil spill on pregnant women and women's health. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

This is the first long-term study to examine the effects of a major oil spill on pregnant women and women's health, says Lichtveld, Freeport McMoRan Chair of Environmental Policy.

"Pregnant women are always a population of concern when there are environmental exposures, as the developing fetus may be vulnerable to even small doses of contaminants," [Lichtveld](#) says. "To our knowledge, this is also the first study to

examine maternal stress and anxiety related to a major oil spill and the associated effects on birth outcomes, fetal health and family-planning behavior.”

The grant creates the Transdisciplinary Research Consortium for Gulf Resilience on Women's Health at Tulane. The consortium will quantify potential exposure levels among women to environmental contaminants via seafood consumption and air emissions; study how disasters affect reproduction decisions; and explore how environmental and social disparities affect women's health and pregnancies.

The study covers Jefferson, Lafourche, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and Terrebonne parishes. The consortium will partner with community groups to conduct its research.

“The entire research consortium is centered around community-based participatory research,” Lichtveld says. “Our communities will help design the studies, are active partners in implementing the studies, and will play a leadership role in translating and disseminating the study results. This assures that we make science work for our communities.”

The consortium will work with Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corp., Bayou Interfaith Sharing Community Organizing and Women Infant and Children (WIC) clinics in the affected parishes to conduct the study.