

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

**Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman**  
**Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**HHS Actions to Identify and Address Health Effects of the BP Oil Spill**  
**Subcommittee on Health**  
**June 16, 2010**

Chairman Pallone, thank you for holding today's hearing on the Department of Health and Human Service's critically important role in addressing the health effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

It has been nearly two months since the devastating oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico killed 11 people and injured 15 others. The Energy and Commerce Committee has been examining various dimensions of this unprecedented catastrophe, including tomorrow's oversight hearing at which we will hear directly from BP CEO Tony Hayward.

Today's hearing takes on another aspect of the spill and underscores one reason why our focus is so comprehensive and so important: This oil spill has the potential to directly impact – for years to come – the health and well-being of millions of people who live and work in or near the Gulf area.

This afternoon we will examine potential health risks to cleanup workers, many of whom can no longer engage in their primary livelihoods because of this horrific spill. We will also learn about how the spill may touch the broader population living near the Gulf coast. As we know from previous spills, these risks may include respiratory complications, headaches, throat and eye irritation, rashes, skin problems, nausea, fatigue, and heat exhaustion. The possibility of more serious, long-term illness has been under study. And the psychological toll of a disaster like this can be very real as well.

Today's witnesses will describe actions taken by the Department of Health and Human Services to assess these potential risks and address whatever health problems do materialize. The HHS agencies represented are working with each other, with other Departments, and with state and local governments on surveillance mechanisms, food safety controls, worker trainer programs, and epidemiological studies. Unfortunately, I suspect their efforts will be needed for a long time to come.

Yesterday, in testimony before this Subcommittee, Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), committed \$10 million for research on the health effects of the oil spill. This is exactly the type of initiative that needs to be taken now, and I commend NIH for its efforts.

I know our own activities regarding this disaster will continue for as long as necessary and appropriate. Indeed, as the primary committee in the House for overseeing the Department of Health and Human Services, we are committed to ensuring that HHS lives up to its responsibilities and most especially, to its mandate to protect the public health.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank today's witnesses for appearing before us today. I look forward to hearing their testimony.