

What if I find a tar ball?

If you see what appears to be a tar ball:

- ▶ Don't pick it up.
- ▶ Report it by calling **(800) 424-8802** for the National Response Center or dial **#DEP** from a cell phone for the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection.



What is a tar ball?

Tar balls are sticky fragments of weathered oil and debris that look like asphalt lumps. Although tar balls vary in appearance, most are coin-sized. Tar balls are formed when oil that is floating on the surface of the water is stretched and torn by winds and waves into small pieces. Over time, the lighter components of the oil evaporate. The remaining oil mixes with water and sediment, such as sand. The consistency is similar to a toasted marshmallow—hard and crusty on the outside, soft and goeey on the inside.

Has oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill reached Pinellas County?

No. There have been no oil impacts from the Deepwater Horizon spill anywhere on the west coast of Florida. All Tampa Bay/St. Petersburg/Clearwater beaches are untouched by oil and open for enjoyment.

Are tar balls expected in the future?

The threat is “essentially zero” for oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill reaching the shoreline of western Florida (including Pinellas County), according to Bill Conner, Chief of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Emergency Response Division. However, there may be occasional tar balls or oil sheen due to boat traffic or natural seepage.

What happens if I report a tar ball?

When you call (800) 424-8802 or dial #DEP on a cell phone, the information will be relayed to the U.S. Coast Guard in St. Petersburg. A pollution investigator will respond to assess the situation. Some reported sightings are organic material, such as seaweed or algae. If the material is a petroleum product, it will be removed and tested. If possible, the responsible party will be identified and billed for the cleanup. If not, there is a national oil contingency fund that is used to pay for cleanup work.



Why not pick up a tar ball?

Direct contact with oil should be avoided. For most people, an occasional brief contact with a small amount of oil will do no harm. However, some people are especially sensitive to chemicals and may have an allergic reaction or develop rashes. If accidental contact occurs, wash the area with soap and water, baby oil or the cleaning paste sold at auto parts stores. It is important not to dispose of a tar ball without reporting it, since it prevents the possible identification and billing of a responsible party.

Are tar balls unusual?

No. There have been isolated occurrences of tar balls (unrelated to Deepwater Horizon) in Pinellas County. Other areas of Florida, such as the Keys, have more frequent sightings due to the wind patterns, sea currents and proximity to shipping channels.



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