



BPSOS

EMPOWERING, ORGANIZING, AND EQUIPPING
VIETNAMESE INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES
IN THEIR PURSUIT OF LIBERTY AND DIGNITY

GULF COAST OIL DISASTER RESPONSE UPDATES – September 15, 2010

- **Volunteers in the Gulf:** Thanks to the generous support of Southwest Airlines, we have sent staff from BPSOS national headquarters and volunteers from different cities to the Gulf Coast. As part of our Gulf Coast Volunteer Program, we hosted eight volunteers from Seattle, Portland, New York City, and Orange County (California) who spent a week in the Gulf Coast attending town hall meetings, meeting with families, documenting local needs, and assisting in distributing food to local residents. Three of the volunteers spent time interviewed impacted families for a documentary. The goal of this team of volunteers was to lay the foundation for other teams to follow. The next team of volunteers will be deployed in the week of September 20 to help with claims clinics hosted by BPSOS-NAVASA Gulf Coast.
- **Presidential Visit:** On the 5 year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama [visited](#) New Orleans on Sunday August 29, 2010. The President renewed his commitment to rebuild the Gulf Coast. BPSOS Executive Director Nguyen Dinh Thang was on stage along with other advocates to welcome and witness the President's speech.
- **Townhall Meetings:** In the week of August 28 – September 6, Dr. Thang held town meetings with Vietnamese fisherfolks in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Over 100 individuals attended these meetings. Findings from these town meetings are being compiled into a memo to be circulated to policy makers. Key points include:
 1. The Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF) promised a decision within 48 hours of the submission of a claim for the 6-month emergency assistance. Scores of individuals at the town meetings had not heard back from GCCF after two weeks. They called GCCF only to be told to wait.
 2. GCCF calculates lost revenue and issues the check without providing any rationale behind the calculations. In some instances, it's impossible to figure out the amount that GCCF came up with.
 3. It appears that there is no appeal process for disagreement on the GCCF 6-month emergency payment. Any dispute must be addressed in the final claim. This poses two problems. First, some families can not wait that long. Second, the final claim comes with a waiver of the claimant's right to a law suit.
 4. Vessels of Opportunity and OSHA training: VOO is phasing out and this opportunity for employment will soon end.
 5. Authorities have declared that seafood in the Gulf Coast is safe to eat. However, buyers may not buy in. The fishermen would like to get the stamp of certification from such authorities as to the quality of the seafood. If contamination is found later or consumer gets poisoned, who will be responsible in case of law suits--the shrimper or the authorities? There is concern that shrimp is contaminated because the crude is heavy and tends to sink to the bottom.
 6. Concerns expressed by the fishermen have been ignored by the authorities. There is no mechanism to follow up and address the concerns.

7. Some fishermen reportedly discovered oil among shrimp caught. They notified the Coast Guard, which came by and took away all the evidence. Is there a more transparent process or venue to report such discoveries?
 8. The fishermen are at the total mercy of the buyers, which determine whether to buy the shrimp or not. If not, the fishermen have to dispose of their catch at their own expenses. Will GCCF pay for that?
 9. Some town meetings or workshops organized by BP were announced less than one day in advance, causing many fishermen to be unable to attend.
 10. Why shrimpers are not hired to conduct surveillance for illegal use of dispersant or decontamination work, to detect oil patches and especially to collect samples deep below the surface or in inlets for testing?
- **Assisting Fishermen in Building Their Own Voice:** At all town meetings Dr. Thang encouraged the Vietnamese fisherfolks to organize themselves so as to represent their own interests. “You should welcome all the support from all the people and groups but you need to speak out with your own voice and take ownership of your own interests,” Dr. Thang said. Responding to this call into action, fishermen in different locations have come together to form their own associations. On September 9, Tien Vu, Interim Executive Director of National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA), met with Vietnamese fisherfolks in Mississippi to form a new association. The BPSOS-NAVASA Gulf Coast team currently works with the new association coordinators to develop its by-laws.
 - **Oil Spill Claims Community Clinic:** Based on the findings of the town meetings, BPSOS-NAVASA will host a series of claims clinics in Bayou La Batre, Biloxi and Plaquemines Parish next week to collect evidence supporting and to document the concerns expressed by impacted fisherfolks.
 - Mon. 9/20: [Biloxi Clinic](#)
 - Tue. 9/21: [Bayou La Batre Clinic](#)
 - Wed. 9/22: [Plaquemines Parish Clinic](#)

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Founded in 1980, BPSOS is a national community organization operating at 18 locations across the United States. BPSOS empowers individuals, strengthens families, and builds communities through Direct Services, Advocacy, Media, Community Development and Organizing, and Research. For more information, please see www.bpsos.org.

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