



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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For Immediate Release

September 8, 2008

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DEQ responding to fish kills in the aftermath of Hurricane Gustav

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is currently responding to several occurrences of fish kills across Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Gustav. These fish kills are associated with low dissolved oxygen in the water, which results from the decaying organic matter washed into water bodies from storm debris and runoff.

Additionally, with many areas still without power, sewage treatment plants (larger ones serving subdivisions and smaller ones serving single family dwellings) are discharging raw or partially treated sewage into some water bodies. As the organic matter in the water decays, the oxygen levels reduce to the point of being detrimental, even fatal, to fish. The situation is worsened by the inability of some water bodies to flow due to high water downstream. As flood waters recede, flow in streams is restored, and debris and other material are removed from the water bodies, oxygen levels will return to levels that will support aquatic life.

An additional cause of fish kills is the influx of salt water further inland than normally found. This is anticipated to impact the aquatic vegetation that is intolerant to a salty environment. These conditions are expected to stabilize and diminish fairly rapidly. A similar fish kill and vegetation disturbance effect was seen following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

Please report any occurrences of fish kills or environmental concerns to the DEQ hotline, at 225-219-3640 or 1-888-763-5424.

DEQ is currently conducting aerial and ground reconnaissance, as well as documenting and reporting these conditions. DEQ's Water Quality Assessment Division staff, assisted by other divisions within the Office of Environmental Assessment, is working with Surveillance Division field staff to multiply forces and increase DEQ's response capabilities for fish kill investigations in the impacted areas. Additionally, ambient water quality sampling is being initiated to track dissolved oxygen levels at a number of locations in the impacted area.