

On June 1, the first globs of oil began washing up on Dauphin Island. While smaller tar balls have been spotted along the Gulf Coast as far east as Panama City for several weeks, the arrival of the larger oil patches on Dauphin Island confirms that the spill finally poses a threat to coastal Mobile and Baldwin counties.

As the oily muck came ashore last week, I joined Governor Bob Riley, Senator Jeff Sessions and other local and state officials in reassessing state and federal efforts to protect our coast, including estuaries and wildlife.

Together, we continued to urge that every possible resource and ounce of manpower be made available to clean up this unwanted invader of our pristine beaches.

For weeks now, the Obama administration has argued that BP is responsible for the oil spill and should pay for the clean-up, and hardly anyone would disagree.

But no one I've talked with believes that the federal government should simply sit by and wait for an overwhelmed and underprepared oil company to handle the simultaneous mammoth tasks of stopping the oil spill, managing the clean-up, and overseeing the processing of economic damage claims.

For sure, BP is responsible for this environmental and economic disaster. And unquestionably, BP will pay for the damage and clean-up.

But I, for one, have been arguing for weeks that the federal government must assume a much greater role in what has quickly become not just a regional disaster, but a national disaster.

It's past time for the Obama administration to take charge of leading clean-up and disaster payment operations while allowing BP to focus on stopping this unprecedented spill.

We can send BP the bill, and certainly, we will. But when your house is on fire, your first priority should be to put it out.

Can Oil and Hurricanes Mix?:

Normally the arrival of hurricane season, complete with official predictions of more menacing storms, would stir up plenty of coffee shop chatter. Folks might wonder whether 2010 will usher in another Frederic or Ivan?

But the unusual circumstance of this year's Gulf oil spill has muted such speculation. Instead of worrying about storm surges and wind damage, many are pondering what a hurricane will do to the spill.

A week before announcing the beginning of hurricane season, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued an oil spill response bulletin addressing the possibility of a hurricane collision with the huge oil slick. NOAA's conclusions seem to assign an even chance to a hurricane making the spill's impact worse as it might diminish the oil's effects

in the Gulf.

On the positive side, NOAA observes that high winds and seas will mix and “weather” the oil which can help break it down more quickly. For example, high winds could disperse and scatter the oil over a wider area, making it less of a threat. NOAA also notes that the storm’s track would have an impact on whether the oil slick comes ashore or is swept farther out into the Gulf.

As residents along the Gulf know, a hurricane’s winds blow counter-clockwise. NOAA states a hurricane passing to the east of the oil spill might force it away from land, while a hurricane passing to the west of the spill could blow it on shore.

Clearly, if the latter occurs, oil could be brought inland on storm surges, resulting in the contamination of a far greater area than just shorelines.

For those who might be hoping that the large oil slick could actually weaken a Gulf hurricane by blocking its access to large areas of warm water, NOAA throws cold water on such speculation. While it is possible for a massively large oil spill to affect water evaporation, which is needed to power a hurricane’s development, the Gulf oil spill is not yet large enough or a continuous sheet of oil.

We’ve all heard reports of huge amounts of submerged oil in the Gulf. By some estimates, more oil is under water than on the surface. Thus, one might wonder if a hurricane could bring this oil up out of the depths and eventually up on land? NOAA says no. In fact, it suggests that a hurricane will simply disperse the oil.

Oil and hurricanes have mixed before in the Gulf. During hurricanes Katrina and Rita, oil was released as a result of storm damage to onshore and offshore oil facilities and ships. NOAA reports that the oil was simply mixed and dispersed.

Finally, for those who want to know if hurricanes will actually draw up oil, causing it to rain oil, NOAA says that this cannot happen.

Obviously, there are many unanswered questions at the beginning of this new hurricane season.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.