

Murky Waters:

Hurricane Preparedness & Response for Polluters Long Overdue

Photo Credit: NOAA

2,230 reported pollution events that occurred directly or indirectly because of Hurricane Ida.

171 oil spills involving at least **229,633 gallons cumulatively**.

257 reports of oil spills or sheens, and 22 of these oil spills and sheens added up to an area that equaled **over 25 square miles**.

48 instances of air pollution reported, with **over 1 million pounds of pollutants emitted**, or approximately **730 tons**.

For full report, go to: healthygulf.org/IdaReport

An analysis of Hurricane Ida pollution reports

In the months following the August 29, 2021 landfall of Hurricane Ida, reports of pollutant releases due to the storm were examined by aggregating and analyzing otherwise unorganized data from several reporting agencies. In total, the assessment of Hurricane Ida-related release data shows that there were 2,230 pollution events that occurred directly or indirectly because of the hurricane. Among those were 171 oil spills involving at least 5,436 barrels (229,633 gallons) cumulatively. There were 257 reports of oil spills or sheens, and 22 of these oil spills and sheens added up to an area that equaled over 65 million square meters (approximately 25 square miles). There were 48 instances of air pollution reported, with over 1 million pounds of pollutants emitted. Despite the alarmingly high numbers, these totals are almost guaranteed to be an undercount of what was actually released due to severely lacking data protocols by the response agencies involved. There was also an unreasonable level of difficulty in obtaining this (public) data, and what was obtained was highly variable in quality and depth of information. The vast amount of pollution incident records obtained were simply a data point indicating a simple occurrence, without specification of type of pollution or amount, but that were flagged to be investigated further.

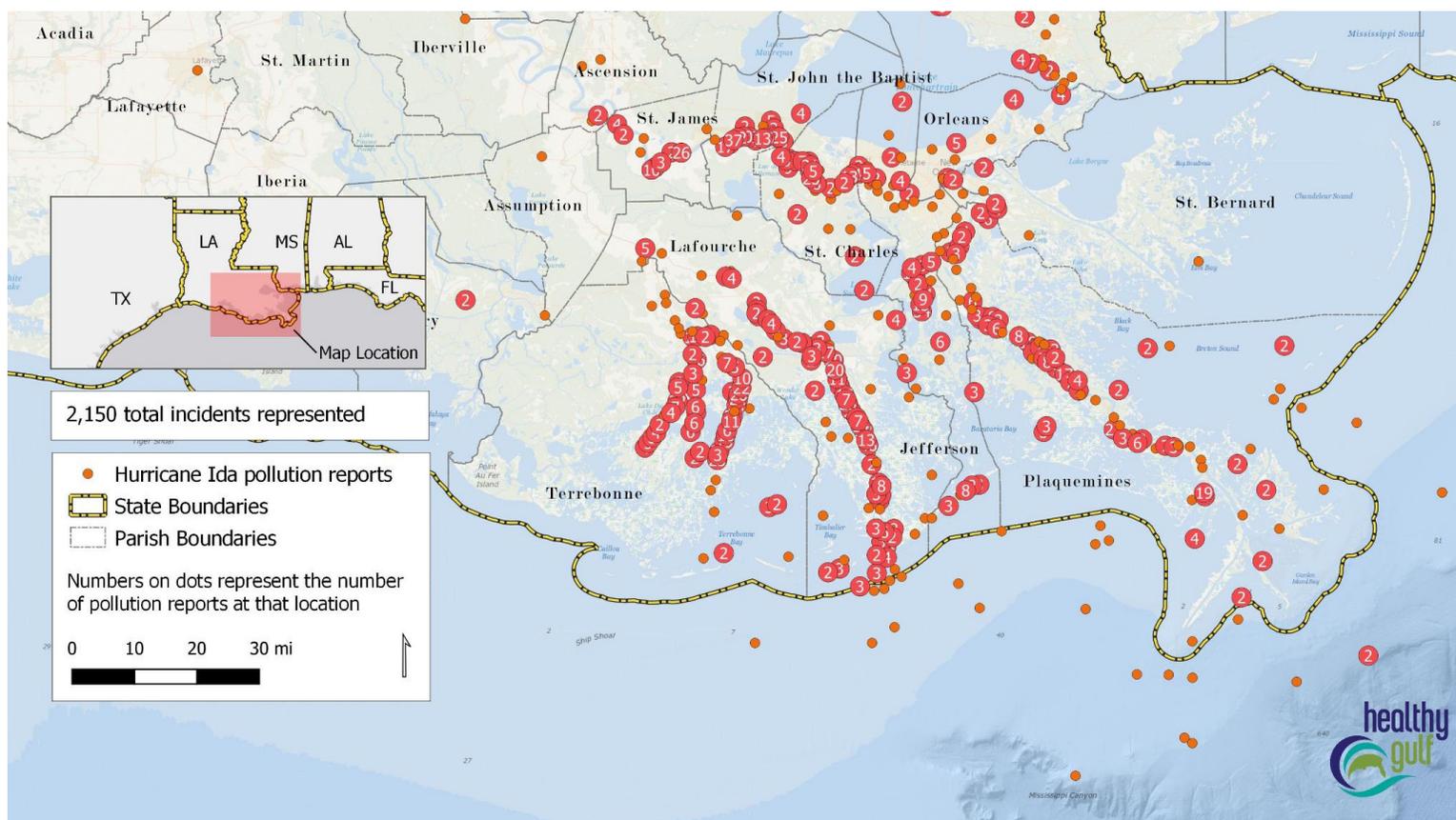


Norco Shell Oil Refinery, 04 Sept. 2021. Photo: Healthy Gulf, care of SouthWings.

Of the 2,230 reported releases, only 150 reports included specific spill or pollution amounts. The majority of identifiable types of pollution events consisted of spills, emissions or debris from the fossil fuel industry (oil, gas and petrochemical). The recklessness of the fossil fuel industry, and the lack of meaningful regulation of that industry, is evident since there are myriad pollution incidents that occur with every massive hurricane. The increasing frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones are a result of climate change resulting from the burning of fossil fuels. Since fossil fuels are the basis of the majority of polluting facilities, there is a clear case for moving away from fossil fuels, and doing so under a justice-driven lens.

Gulf Coast communities and ecosystems can't afford to continue the old ways of using and processing fossil fuels. The fossil fuel industry has an imperative to commit to this transition process, and also must focus on prevention of future spills and toxic disasters. Fossil fuel facilities should conduct every prevention measure available, until a "Just Transition" to renewable energy has successfully occurred. Fossil fuel facilities must also shoulder the cost burden of implementing prevention measures, as well as disposing safely of waste and decommissioning facilities properly. Regulators and disaster environmental response agencies can create a system of accountability that protects people and is focused on clean air and water, prioritizing the most vulnerable populations. These agencies must live up to their mission statements, by employing vastly improved transparency and accessibility of pollution data. A data standard across agencies and a centralized, easily accessible and publicly communicated database, should be amongst the highest priorities.

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Of the full 2,230 pollution incidents in this report, 2,150 occurrences of pollution specified geographic locations. The full dataset consists of 2,230 pollution incidents. Data: Healthy Gulf, LOSCO, LDEQ, EPA, US Census, ESRI.