EPA Administrator to Hancock: 'I know you have to be scared'

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A group of about 300 members of the seafood industry voiced their growing concerns to EPA Secretary Lisa Jackson Friday afternoon at the Leo Seal Community Center in Waveland.

Jackson is the first member of the Obama Administration to visit Hancock County since the Deepwater Horizon oil spill last week.

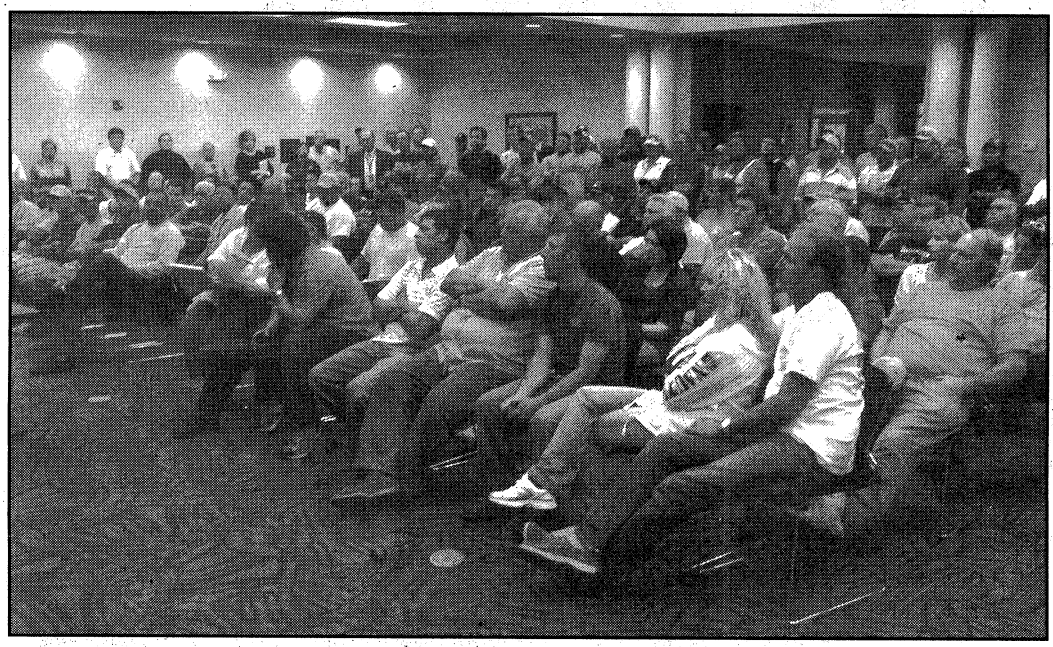
Jackson told the crowd that EPA wants to hear local concerns and that the government will hold BP accountable for the mess it created.

"I know you have to be scared," Jackson said. "The good news is, everyone is getting on board."

EPA official Sam Coleman said the agency is working with other federal agencies to identify when the slick will hit and how much damage it will do.

He said EPA will be deploying mobile laboratories to the area this weekend to take air and ground samples. Jackson said she is very concerned about the potential harm the oil slick may do and asked for opinions from the audience.

"There is not a boom that we should trust," she said. "The folks who know these marshes are the ones who are here. The best service we can do is to be one big set of ears."



Echo staff photo by Dwayne Bremer

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson tells the anxious audience that EPA is seeking local ideas to help with the pending disaster.

Jackson encouraged everyone in the room to begin calling and registering with a national claim number set up by the Coast Guard.

"We need you guys to call that number," she said.

One resident said the government should let locals help in the cleanup.

"We have an armada of boats and we can catch anything," he said. "Them oil guys don't know how to catch anything."

Another fisherman said those in attendance wanted to know what the government was going to do to help people who will soon be unemployed.

"We have families to feed," he said.

Coleman and Jackson both said that EPA intends to hold BP accountable.

"I don't want it to be said that BP is not responsible for affecting your business," Coleman said.

"This is all about funding," Jackson said. "BP needs to keep writing checks."

Coleman said that the EPA is committed to ensuring the least effects on the environment and it will continue to assess the situation.

Joe Jewel of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources said he would collect a list of people who were interested in assisting in the clean-up efforts and pass that along to BP.

"They are not hiring right now because the event has not happened," he said. "They will be looking to bring in people for shoreline response."

Jackson said everyone should prepare for the worst but hope for the best.

"It's not like anything we have ever seen before," she said. "We are going to pray for the absolute best."