

NEWS RELEASE

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2-1-1 Big Bend Launches Oil Spill Distress Helpline *~ Relief for struggling residents available 24/7 ~*

TALLAHASSEE – 2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc. today launched the Oil Spill Distress Helpline to assist Florida residents impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The new helpline, 800-985-5990, serves those struggling with stress, anger and resentment caused by the economic and psychological impact of the spill. Trained counselors are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and calls are free and confidential.

“We are honored to be selected as the response agency for Florida’s families during their time of need,” said 2-1-1 Big Bend President, Randy Nicklaus. “This helpline complements the comprehensive care we provide through our existing six hotlines and speaks to the continued need in our coastal communities.”

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that some individuals affected by the oil spill are exhibiting early signs of substance abuse and dependence, psychiatric disorders, suicidal tendencies, and familial breakdown. Administered by SAMHSA, the helpline will route callers to the nearest Gulf Coast area crisis center. It received \$10 million of \$52 million BP contributed to fund mental health, substance abuse support services and outreach programs in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. 2-1-1 Big Bend, Inc. received \$140,000 to fund the helpline and advocacy efforts.

According to [data](#) published yesterday by the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF), 30,084 Floridians submitted a claim to cover the economic impact to the environment or their livelihoods. Yet only 17,301 have received payment. During the next 15 months, 2-1-1 Big Bend will launch a grassroots outreach effort to educate Floridians about the helpline and support services available.

“People are frustrated and overwhelmed by the spill’s impact in their communities,” said 2-1-1 Big Bend Director of Hotline Programs Rosey Ilic. “Floridians are resilient, but we know that if left untreated, the mental well-being of these individuals will dramatically deteriorate and create a more costly impact in the long run.

2-1-1 Big Bend answers more than 60,000 calls each year through its six hotline programs. The regional 2-1-1 helpline program is a 24/7 service that assisted more than 25,000 callers last year. Thousands of people have sought help for unemployment, utilities, food, housing and mental health concerns. Anyone can dial 2-1-1 in the Capital Area for help with these issues and other concerns.

For more information about 2-1-1 Big Bend and the Oil Spill Distress Helpline, visit www.211bigbend.org. 2-1-1 Big Bend is a United Way Agency.