

Escambia County Health Department Pensacola, Florida

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Residents advised to avoid tar balls at beaches

PENSACOLA – The Escambia County Health Department continues to advise residents to avoid contact with tar balls that may be in the water or on shore. Tar balls frequently wash onto Florida beaches -- residents and visitors have seen them for many years.

What are tar balls?

Tar balls are fragments or lumps of oil weathered to a semi-solid or solid consistency, feel sticky, and are difficult to remove. They range in size from a pinhead to approximately 30 centimeters in diameter.

Are they harmful?

Tar balls are not harmful – they are a nuisance. If you walk barefoot on the beach in the impacted areas, you may ultimately find tar residue on your feet.

Tar on the skin

Individuals should avoid contact with tar balls. However, if an individual's skin comes into contact with tar:

1. Wash with soap and large amounts of water. Health officials discourage the use of gasoline, kerosene or other solvents to clean oil from skin.
2. If tar is not removed with soap and water, scrape off the excess tar from your skin and apply a grease removing agent – such as a grease-fighting dish detergent -- or mineral oil. Rinse your skin with large amounts of fresh water.
3. Remove contaminated clothing.
4. If symptoms or irritation occur, call a physician.

Information on Health Effects

Individuals can get information on the possible [health effects of contact with oil](#) from the Florida Department of Health and Escambia County Health Department oil spill web page at www.EscambiaHealth.com. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection provides [information on tar balls](#) and beach clean-up.