



**Mississippi River
Gulf of Mexico
Watershed Nutrient
Task Force**

The Hypoxia Task Force

Moving Forward On Gulf Hypoxia



What is Hypoxia?

Hypoxia refers to areas of low oxygen that cannot sustain marine life. Hypoxia is a worldwide problem caused by excess nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, which feed intensive growths of algae. The algae deplete the oxygen in the water when they die, sink to the bottom, and decompose. One of the largest hypoxic areas in the world is found in the Gulf of Mexico where excess nutrients, originating from the great productivity of Middle American cities, farms, and industries, flow into the Gulf from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers. This vast area of hypoxia forms every summer off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas and threatens to change the biology and economic productivity of the region.

The 2014 area of hypoxia, commonly known as the 'Dead Zone,' measured 13,080 square kilometers (=5,052 square miles) as of August 1, 2014. The 2014 dead zone size is below the five-year average (14,353 square kilometers), but still well above the Hypoxia Task Force goal of 5,000 square kilometers.

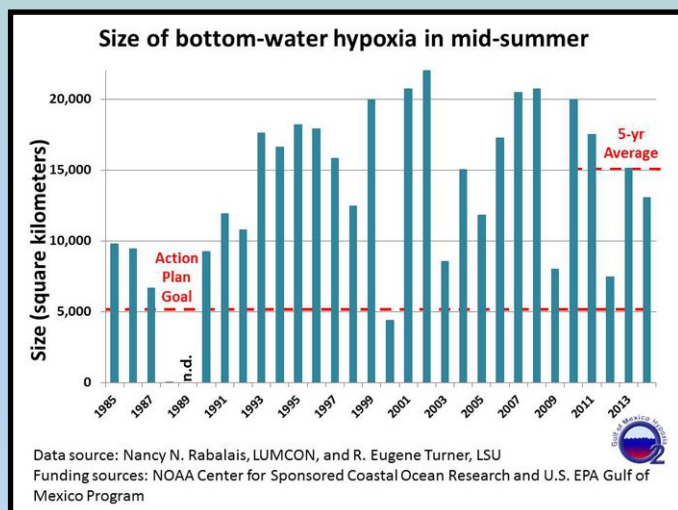
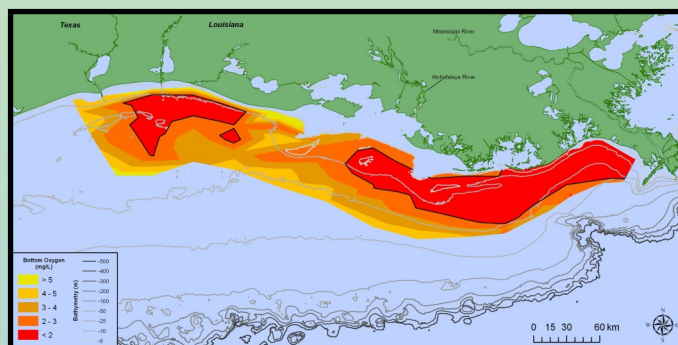
Why is it still there?

The geographical separation of the source of the problem from the impacts in the Gulf, coupled with the immense size and scale of the hypoxic zone result in an environmental problem laden with obstacles. The greatest source of pollution causing the hypoxic zone in the Gulf is nonpoint source runoff from agriculture. According to a 2013 USGS report, agricultural nonpoint sources of pollution contribute 60% of the nitrogen loads and 49% of the phosphorus loads delivered to the Gulf of Mexico. Other sources of nutrient loads include atmospheric deposition and urban areas. Additionally, physical changes to the Mississippi River for flood control and navigation contribute to the persistence of the Gulf hypoxic zone.

What is the Hypoxia Task Force doing about it?

Established in 1997, the Hypoxia Task Force (HTF) brings together 12 upper and lower Mississippi River Basin states and five federal agencies to partner on local and regional efforts to reduce nutrient pollution. It encourages a holistic approach that takes into account up-stream sources and down-stream impacts. In 2008, the HTF adopted its second Gulf Hypoxia action plan. The action plan identifies specific actions for stakeholders throughout the Mississippi River Basin with the development and implementation of state nutrient reduction strategies as its key priority.

2014 Hypoxia Survey Results





State Nutrient Reduction Strategies

Some HTF states are implementing nutrient reduction strategies, with the remainder working towards development of completed strategies. The federal agencies continue to support state nutrient strategies by providing technical assistance and tools. Other areas of focus are expanding partnerships and tracking the results of strategy implementation.

Visit the website to learn more about Hypoxia and Task Force activities and successes.

www.epa.gov/msbasin

Members of the Task Force

State Agencies

Arkansas Natural Resources Commission
 Illinois Department of Agriculture
 Indiana State Department of Agriculture
 Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
 Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection
 Louisiana Governor's Office of Coastal Activities
 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
 Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
 Missouri Department of Natural Resources
 Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
 Tennessee Department of Agriculture
 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Federal Agencies

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 (Research, Education, and Economics
 Natural Resource Conservation Service)
 U.S. Department of Commerce
 (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)
 U.S. Department of the Interior
 (U.S. Geological Survey
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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