

## Day 34: August 19, 2010

A day of PR and errands, today. We did an interview with local FOX affiliate: [http://www.fox10tv.com/dpp/news/gulf\\_oil\\_spill/how-will-dispersants-affect-whales](http://www.fox10tv.com/dpp/news/gulf_oil_spill/how-will-dispersants-affect-whales). Then another brief on with local channel 15. After that, we spent most of the day running errands with Johnny and Matt preparing to return to sea. We managed to get the samples from the Atlantic shipped back to USM. I expected the dry ice needs to be the tricky part- nope - it was the Styrofoam box we could not find. In the end, we bought a simple cooler and cut it up. We also now have an EPA-approved sediment sampler on the boat on loan from our collaborator OSS.

Cathy made it home fine and did her fitness test for the coach and came out ranked number one in fitness for the team.... told you those watches were tough work! Might be a new preseason approach for the coach- 1 month at sea! Greer and Ryan did not check in so I assume that have made it home safely too... ah how soon they forget us...

I am finding the aspect I am least prepared for and perhaps most overwhelmed by is the uncertainty and concern of the Gulf residents. They are scared. They are worried. They are confused. When they realize who we are and what we are doing, particularly when the light goes on in their minds (and you can see it in a notable shift in both their expression and their body language- truly remarkable) that we are trained in toxicology and we understand the problem, their questions and the concern come pouring out. I spend a lot of my time in port just talking about how one understands the toxicity of dispersants and how little we know and why it is going to take a while to find out. They are so hungry for simple frank conversation and just want to know what they are up against. They feel caught in a series of spin cycles from the government, from industry and from environmentalists and all they want to know is what do we know now, what do we need to find out and how long is it going to take. Fortunately, I have a certain "comfort level" with frank honest talk...

Tonight for example, Johnny and Matt and I were having wings and chips and quietly recovering from a myriad of errands and getting fueled up for our laundry run. Someone unexpectedly blurted out- hey "You're the guys on that sailboat. You're studying the whales. You were on the news tonight" and with that we found ourselves again in an intense discussion about what it all means and when we will know.

These interactions add a layer of urgency and importance to the work that was quite unexpected. They remove several layers of anonymity and privacy from us and our days making true rest and recovery a challenge. At the same time, they remind us that our work is not just an ordinary biologically interesting experiment or set of data, but rather it carries a large societal responsibility and impact. Thus, we carry that understanding with us always as there is no escaping it. It will inspire us and carry us through the difficult moment, but it will also tire us out from time to time. Nevertheless, we will continue to talk and engage as long as the conversation is needed as it is the least we can do during this difficult time. Our shoulders are broad and we can be patient and one thing that the students are definitely learning is to listen and be patient. I have

encountered this most with Johnny and Matt and they really do listen to the people talking and try their best to reassure and inform- though sometimes I know they are happy to pass the question over to me.

Let's hope this type of event never happens again.

John