

# Jacksonville nonprofit pledges to place hundreds in oil cleanup jobs

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By [David Bauerlein](#)

Cleaning up the Deepwater Horizon oil spill will require thousands of workers, and some of those headed to Gulf Coast beaches will be traveling across Interstate 10 from Jacksonville.

Operation New Hope, a Jacksonville nonprofit that helps people with criminal records, has set a goal of facilitating jobs for 300 to 500 people in the Gulf cleanup over the next six months.

The organization finished training its first group of about 30 people on Thursday. They will leave next week for the Pensacola area where they will work long hours in scorching heat. The payback will be paychecks at a time when jobs are scarce, plus the benefit of “boots-on-the-ground work experience when they come back,” said Operation New Hope President Kevin Gay.

“You’ve got to think of nontraditional ways to help people find jobs,” he said.

The city’s Jacksonville Journey program, aimed at reducing crime, is playing a role by paying for the instructor who teaches a four-day, 40-hour course in hazardous materials. Completion of the course earns a “hazwoper” certification, which is short for hazardous waste operations and emergency response.

British Petroleum is paying for the cleanup and hiring contractors. Those contractors in turn need trained workers.

The state of Florida launched an online site where people can get information about applying for an estimated 3,500 jobs connected with the oil spill recovery effort. Most of the companies listed on the site have offices in the Panhandle, but I-Tech Personnel of Jacksonville is taking applications for laborers. The pay is \$12 an hour.

The state’s website says job-seekers interested in I-Tech Personnel must fill out applications at these WorkSource locations: 5000 Norwood Ave., Suite 2 ; 6800 Southpoint Parkway, Suite 150, both in Jacksonville; or 1845 Town Center Blvd., Suite 150 on Fleming Island in Clay County.

Gay said Operation New Hope is telling people the work along the Gulf will be difficult, but the long hours will create opportunities for overtime pay.

At the training session Thursday, instructor Michael Liles showed off the head-to-toe protective gear that workers would put on if they faced dangerous chemicals in the air. But he said the most likely risk will be failing to drink enough to counter the blazing sun.

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