

Bonus: Oil Spill Update No. 2

The Gulf Podcast

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

[Jen Brown]: You're listening to The Gulf podcast. Hi everyone, this is Jen. I'm here today with my student production assistant, Alyssa Lucas.

[Alyssa Lucas]: Hi.

[Brown]: She's kind of shy. It is January 11, 2023, and we are just here to give you a very brief update on the events that happened at city hall yesterday. So, the morning kicked off with a press conference. Can you tell us a little bit about that. You were there covering it?

[Lucas]: Yes, I was there. It started at 8:30. Um, it was actually really good to see like friends from Islander Green, people I knew from Islander Green Team and just some other people I've been following on social media in regards to their environmental efforts, so it was really cool. It was like, wow. I'm your biggest fan.

[Brown]: The press conference though, just to give some background, it was put on by environmental groups?

[Lucas]: Yes, or as far as I know. It was many different ones. I know Chispa was there, Islander Green was there, a lot of people from Hillcrest Residential Association where there, but I don't know if they were a part of also assembling that, but it was many different organizations. I don't remember all their names.

[Brown]: And where was it held?

[Lucas]: Um, right in front of the city hall building.

[Brown]: Okay, can you tell me about what the message was and what they were trying to convey?

[Lucas]: Yeah, it was mainly about how they just really were wanting like, you know, the city to do better in regards to transparency and diversifying the economy. They just don't want so much reliance on industry. Especially, with how much harm it's done in like—so basically, they were talking about like, "We don't want another event of this oil spill and here are the things that we think can improve for our future because we deserve better as a city, society."

[Brown]: Um-hm. What was the atmosphere like during this press conference?

[Lucas]: It was kind of nice. I mean, it was a lot of like really supportive people who believed in the cause. So, obviously everyone was very passionate about what they were talking about, like it's a serious subject of like, you know, the future but everyone there wanted to be a part of it, and it's almost hopeful.

[Brown]: Okay and tell me about the bucket.

[Lucas]: Oh yeah, the bucket. Okay, so a day before, I think it was the day before, the press conference, a couple of the other organizations put together, and they went and they were going to go clean up North Beach because apparently North Beach like apparently is clean, so they were like, "Okay, cool." Well, they went out there, they're like, "It's definitely not," so they assembled a group of volunteers who just really wanted to dedicate their time for the beach, and they had both a trash bag and then just a bunch of extra crude oil in the bucket, and it's crazy to think this is just visible to the public eye. Like, if you go and you walk, and you don't have to look very hard to find it. It's not like they were like, "Ah-ha, we found a little piece." Like, no, it's a lot.

[Brown]: So, it was a bucket full of crude oil that they found on Monday, the—

[Lucas]: It was like the little, you know, yellow chunks and stuff.

[Brown]: Yeah, Monday the ninth, January ninth, okay.

[Lucas]: What was some of the main topics in regards to like the environment at the meeting?

[Brown]: Yeah, so I went to the city council meeting and I got there just as the city manager, Peter Zaroni, was talking about the oil spill and its cleanup efforts and then I listened through all of the public comment and then kind of stayed for a while after and then I had to go back to work, unfortunately, but what came in terms of the presentation was that, first off, "It was a good learning lesson." That was the quote from Peter Zaroni in that clearly, they weren't prepared, there was a lack of communication going on between Flint Hills Resources and the city and the city and the public and that came out both in the presentation and then also many of the public comments there. The other thing that the city manager stressed is that there were no beaches closed and no fishing bans and no swimming bans and the city gave daily media releases so that was something that was all stressed in this. And then, this was also the day the new city council was sworn in, and so it was a different atmosphere, and the crowd in the city council chambers was actually pretty large, I think, compared to most normal city council meetings, and it was, I believe, a lot of the spillover from that environmental press conference in the morning, but you had various councilmen and -women asking lots of questions about the policies, about the communication and processes, the lack of protocols, and it was pretty interesting, so I think I'm kind of hopeful coming out of that city council meeting.

[Lucas]: Was there anything else like said in particular that really surprised you about the events that occurred?

[Brown]: One of the things that did come up was that they are investigating the cause of the oil spill, what exactly happened, and there's no timeline on when that investigation will finish, but it is an investigation that will be conducted by Flint Hills Resources.

[Lucas]: That's suspicious. I (both laugh)—

[Brown]: Yeah, and then the public comment was interesting as well. You had a lot of young people. I was actually really surprised at the numbers of young people, your age, college students in their twenties, and they are very concerned about the environment and climate change.

[Lucas]: Did it seem like any sort of plan—was it just talk of like what they could do better, or actual plans being put into place of what we can expect in the future?

[Brown]: Oh, that's a good question. So, one of the things that was later on in the agenda was setting up a contract with an environmental services company to handle some of the oil spill aspects for the city, and I know that council members and actually members of the public are talking about, why didn't we use the city's alert system, right, when you get those text messages from the city.

[Lucas]: And there's no signs on the beaches, like how do you know. I don't—

[Brown]: Right. Yeah, there are a lot of questions still to be asked in terms of, are they going to be conducting investigations on their own about the causes of the oil spill and about the city's involvement in the cleanup efforts and how that can improve? Are they going to be investigating the causes of the death of the jellyfish? Are they going to test the sand to see if there's still toxicity in the sand, and that's happened in a lot of previous oil spills that—famous Santa Barbara oil spill back in the sixties, so there are still a lot of things that need cleaned up and one of things I guess I should also say in the city council is both the city manager and Flint Hills Resources, they were like, "Well, it's winding down," then when the public comments started, Armon Alex, and he's one of the co-founders with Maggie Peacock of the Gulf of Mexico Youth Climate Summit, they both spoke, but he brought up the bucket (both laugh), and it was just this really great moment of like, okay it's not over and if these young people can find a bunch of light crude oil on the beach then clearly it's still a problem and still an issue. Anyway, I think that's it for our short update. Thanks, and bye.