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MARJORIE R. ESMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 28, 2010

OPEN LETTER CONCERNING MEDIA AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO BP OIL SPILL

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Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box 327
Gretna, LA 70054

Fax 504-278-7603
Sheriff Jack Stephens
St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office
8301 West Judge Perez Drive
Chalmette, LA 70043

Fax 337-775-5211
Sheriff Theos Duhon
Cameron Parish Sheriff's Office
PO Box 1250
Cameron, LA 70631

Fax 337-365-5582
Sheriff Sid Hebert
Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office
300 S. Iberia Street
New Iberia, LA 70560

Fax 337-740-4510
Sheriff Michael Couvillon
Vermilion Parish Sheriff's Office
PO Box 301
Abbeville, LA 70510

Fax 337-828-6972
Sheriff David A. Naquin
St. Mary Parish Sheriff's Office
500 Main Street
Franklin, LA 70538

Fax 504-297-5110
Sheriff I.F. "Jiff" Hingle
Plaquemines Parish Sheriff's Office
302 Main Street
Belle Chasse, Louisiana 70037

Fax (985) 857-0274
Sheriff L. Vernon Bourgeois
Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office
PO Drawer 1670
Houma, LA 70360

Fax 985-447-1854
Sheriff Craig Webre
Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office
200 Canal Blvd.
Thibodaux, LA 70301

Gentlemen:

We have learned from several sources that law enforcement officers have prevented members of the public from filming activities on the beaches affected by the BP oil spill. We have learned of the following incidents, among others:

- Several reporters have been told not to film at spill sites in Louisiana. Incidents include attempts to film on a beach in Grand Isle and near Venice. Reporters are told that they are not allowed to record because BP doesn't want filming there.

- Elmer's Island Wildlife Refuge, off of Grand Isle, is blocked by Jefferson Parish deputies. Deputies told one reporter not to photograph them blocking the road.
- At least one person was told by a Terrebonne Parish sheriff's deputy working private security detail for BP that he wasn't allowed to film the outside of the BP building in Houma from a private, non-BP-owned field across the street. The deputy admitted that the guy wasn't breaking any laws but tried to intimidate him into stopping filming and leaving anyway.
- We have reason to believe that deputies in other coastal parishes may also be working with BP to impede or prevent access to public lands and to interfere with members of the public and the media.

This letter is to notify you that members of the public have the right under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to film, record, photograph, and document anything they observe in a public place. No one – neither law enforcement nor a private corporation – has the legal right to interfere with public access to public places or the recording of activities that occur there. Nor may law enforcement officials cooperate with private companies in denying such access to the public.

We hope that the law enforcement officials of the coastal parishes of Louisiana will respect the Constitution of the United States and the rights of the public to record what they see, and to have full access to public spaces.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,



Marjorie R. Esman