



Advocate staff photo by BILL FEIG

Zachary Elementary School second-graders, from left, Karsyn Kelley, Galvin Oliphant, Madison Booty and Brooklyn Eubanks examine a feather dipped in a mixture of vegetable oil, cocoa and water Monday morning during a small simulation of the Gulf of Mexico oil leak. The students went through the hands-on exercise on the school grounds to learn about what the oil leak means for Gulf wildlife, teacher Kristy Gilpin said.

Students learn from oil-leak exercise

BY STEVEN WARD
Advocate staff writer

ZACHARY — A group of second-grade and third-grade students had a chance Monday to participate in a small simulation of the Gulf of Mexico oil leak and learn what birds are coping with.

Zachary Elementary School students gathered on the school grounds in groups of four around black plastic trays filled with water and plastic shrimp and crabs.

Teacher Kristy Gilpin told the students the trays of water were the Gulf and fake sea life the food locals love to eat.

Gilpin then poured into each tray a mixture of vegetable oil and cocoa powder, made to look like the sweet, light crude that has amassed in the Gulf.

"That's just a little oil. Imagine miles of it now in the Gulf," Gilpin said.

Then she distributed feathers for the students to dip into the water and oily mix.

"Birds can't fly as easy with

the oil on them," Gilpin told the students as they stared at the feathers made thick and sticky by the mix.

Gilpin and some students handed out paper towels, short strings of yarn and cotton swabs. "Try to clean the oil out of the tray," Gilpin told the students.

Like fisherman laying out boom, some students laid out the yarn in the trays while others tried to soak up the oil with the paper towels.

"Did anybody clean up all the oil," Gilpin asked.

Nobody raised their hands.

"That's what going on in the Gulf right now," Gilpin said.

She then poured liquid dishwashing soap into each tray.

As soon as the soap hit the water in the Zachary Elementary simulation, most of the oil disappeared or quickly retreated to the sides of each tray.

The oil leak simulation was an idea of Gilpin and third-grade teacher Breigh Rainey.

Zachary Elementary Princi-

pal Jennifer Maragos and members of her staff came up with the idea of students bringing in change and money to buy soap for bird rescue groups that are trying to clean up oiled birds from the Gulf.

Emily Guidry, a communications manager for the National Wildlife Federation, said the National Audubon Society is using Dawn liquid soap to clean oiled birds affected by the leak.

The Zachary Elementary effort, Coins for the Coast, is a way for students to do their

part in the oil leak disaster, Gilpin said.

"I remember one student said to me, 'I don't want to watch the oil spill news anymore. It's all bad news. Let's do something.' The kids understood what was happening and wanted to help," Gilpin said.

Third-grader Madelyn Beard, 9, said that when she first learned about the Gulf oil leak, she felt like a lot of children in Louisiana. "It's so sad," she said. "This is killing the animals."

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