

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Legislature's Commendation of MDEQ Emergency Services Timely and Appropriate, Governor Musgrove Says**

(Jackson, MS) – Governor Ronnie Musgrove said the Mississippi Legislature's joint resolution commending the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's Emergency Services Branch is timely and appropriate, in light of the agency's outstanding responsiveness during state environmental emergencies. The Emergency Services Branch was recognized for its role in the state's defense against potential biological or chemical acts of terrorism.

"The staff of the Emergency Services Branch serves a vital role in the protection of the safety and security of the people of Mississippi," Musgrove said. "Their expertise and commitment are unquestioned, and that's a combination that makes a great difference for us all."

On average, the MDEQ Emergency Services Branch receives approximately 700 calls per year in its primary function of responding as needed to any incident involving hazardous materials or substances, oil spills or pollutants that pose a threat or potential threat to the health and safety of citizens and environment of the state. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Branch responded to an additional 500 calls of a potential terrorist or anthrax-related activity from September through December of that year.

"We're very proud of our Emergency Services team," said Phil Bass, Director of the Office of Pollution Control for the MDEQ. "These are highly-trained scientists dedicated to their mission. They are out there every day, on call 24/7, ready to respond to any incident that threatens the citizens and the environment."

(more)

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Also noted in the resolution was MDEQ Emergency Services' commitment to assisting state industries who are involved with accidental spills or releases, their reputation for enforcing regulatory clean-up requirements using a reasonable and common sense approach, and their close work and cooperation with local, state and federal agencies.

“In every case, the Emergency Services Branch conducts operations with help and support from other divisions in MDEQ, other state agencies, and local response agencies. It's a true team effort,” said Eric Dear, Chief of the Emergency Services Branch.

The MDEQ Emergency Services Branch staff includes Dear; responders Shannon Lowery, Ernie Shirley and Barry McMaster; and support staff Ken Whitten and Terry Champion.

Additionally, MDEQ last week was named the lead agency for the State Response Team, under a governor's state of emergency, to deal with weapons of mass destruction. The State Response Team, activated in the event of terrorist activity, gives MDEQ and partner state agencies an avenue to work more closely with local emergency and law enforcement personnel.

For more information about the MDEQ Emergency Services Branch, contact Eric Dear at 961-5171, or visit the MDEQ website at [www.deq.state.ms.us](http://www.deq.state.ms.us).

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