

New RESTORE Act center builds on NIEHS experience

By Joe Balintfy

Two NIEHS Environmental Health Sciences Core Center leaders are part of a new research consortium, announced Jan. 16, that is dedicated to successfully restoring and sustaining a healthy environment for humans and animals in the Gulf of Mexico region. The Texas OneGulf Center of Excellence is one of three new Centers of Excellence in Research established under the 2012 Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States (RESTORE) Act.

Grantees Cheryl Walker, Ph.D., and Cornelis (Kees) Elferink, Ph.D., helped establish [Texas OneGulf](#)

(<http://www.hartheresearchinstitute.org/tx-onegulf>)

Consortium. Walker heads the [Center for Translational Environmental Health Research](#)

(<http://ctehr.tamu.edu/>)

at the Texas A&M Health Science Center, (see [story](#)).

Elferink leads the [Center in Environmental Toxicology](#)

(<http://www.utmb.edu/cet/>)

(CET) at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston.

“Having two NIEHS Centers in Texas allowed Drs. Walker and Elferink to bring both expertise and infrastructure to the human health component of the new RESTORE Act center,” said Claudia Thompson, Ph.D., program lead for the NIEHS [Environmental Health Sciences Core Centers](#) and head of the NIEHS Population Health Branch. “Because of their experience as NIEHS center directors, they had immediate access to resources and capacity, such as clinics, communications and outreach capabilities, and connections to the community.”

RESTORE Act

The RESTORE Act directs a portion of the penalties paid by those responsible for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill into a trust fund to support Gulf Coast restoration. The act directs that a portion of the trust fund be used to establish centers of excellence in the five Gulf states affected by the spill. At this time, roughly \$20 million is available for each of those states to establish one or more centers.

Each RESTORE Act Center of Excellence will focus on science, technology, and monitoring. Center goals include ecosystem research, mapping of the Gulf of Mexico, and strategies to support safe and sustainable living. Three centers have been established so far — Texas OneGulf; Subsea Systems Institute, also in Texas; and the Water Institute of the Gulf in Louisiana.

Texas OneGulf

The Texas OneGulf Consortium will study sustainability, restoration, and protection of the coast and deltas. Led by Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, the consortium includes eight other institutions (see [text box](#)).

Walker will serve as deputy director of Texas OneGulf, and Elferink will lead the human health and wellness component. One of the first activities launched by the new center will be a disaster research response project, which Sharon Croisant, Ph.D., director of the Community Outreach and Engagement Core for CET, was instrumental in designing.

“Kees and I have a long-standing working relationship that enabled us to rapidly mobilize both our centers to capture this opportunity, providing a unique human health and wellness focus for OneGulf lacking in the other RESTORE Act centers,” said Walker. “This opportunity will complement ongoing human health research directed by Kees and supported through the NIEHS Deepwater Horizon Research Consortia.”

(Joe Balintfy is a public affairs specialist in the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison.)



“We are delighted that both of the NIEHS centers in the Gulf region will be contributing to Texas OneGulf efforts,” said Walker. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



As director of the Center in Environmental Toxicology, Elferink oversees research focusing on asthma pathogenesis, environmentally linked carcinogenesis, and disease states induced by reactive oxygen stress. (Photo courtesy of Cornelis Elferink)



Thompson oversees NIEHS funding for 20 centers across the country that share scientific equipment, facilities, and other resources among researchers tackling related environmental health questions. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Texas OneGulf Center of Excellence partners

- Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
- Biological and Environmental Sciences at the University of Texas at Brownsville
- Center for Translational Environmental Health Research
- Center for U.S. and Mexican Law at the University of Houston Law Center
- Geochemical and Environmental Research Group and Department of Oceanography at Texas A&M University
- Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System Regional Association
- Marine Biology, Science, and Engineering departments at Texas A&M University at Galveston
- Sealy Center for Environmental Health and Medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch
- The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University

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