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## Settlement reached on guarding against burning deaths of sea turtles in gulf

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The Coast Guard and BP reached a settlement Friday with environmental groups over the issue of how best to guard against accidentally killing endangered sea turtles during controlled burns in the Gulf of Mexico aimed at curbing the oil spill's spread.

Three environmental groups -- the Center for Biological Diversity, the Turtle Island Restoration Network and the Animal Defense League -- had sued in federal court in New Orleans on Wednesday, charging that oil spill responders had taken inadequate precautions while conducting the controlled burns. While activists have not found charred remains of endangered Kemp's Ridley or other sea turtles in the region, they argued the animals are at risk because they tend to congregate in sargassum, seagrasses that burn crews frequently target.

Under the settlement, the two sides have agreed the Coast Guard will soon convene a group of scientists to determine how

best to ensure that no endangered sea turtles die during controlled burns. The environmental groups will have input into assembling the group of experts, and the protocol scientists devise will be put on a fast track for public comment so it can be finalized quickly.

"Sea turtles are already suffering catastrophically from the oil spill and it would be outrageous to add insult to injury by burning them alive in the spill cleanup effort," said the Center for Biological Diversity's executive director Kieran Suckling in an interview. "It's a no-brainer to put sea turtle observers on the cleanup boats and whisk the turtles

out of the oil pools before they're set on fire."

No burning will take place in the gulf before Tuesday, because of poor weather conditions, and by then BP and the Coast Guard must inform the environmental groups whether they are prepared to put scientific observers on every burn boat to identify and remove all turtles before any burns resume.

If they can not make that assurance, Suckling said, the plaintiffs "will be back" in court challenging the controlled burns.

Neither the Coast Guard nor BP could be immediately reached for comment.



A sea turtle covered in oil swims off Louisiana in mid-June. BP was capturing so much oil that it didn't have a big enough boat on site to hold it. (Reuters)

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