

Hundreds in Palm Beach County join hands across beaches to protest offshore drilling

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In her wide-brimmed hat and flip flops, Margo Youngman certainly looked ready for a relaxing day at the beach. But her mission Saturday was serious.

"We need to do something to protect our coast and the whole livelihood of Florida," the Jupiter resident said. "The No. 1 thing we need to think about is the environment. You kill the plankton, you kill us."

Youngman was one of about 50 people who showed up at Carlin Park to participate in a demonstration against offshore oil drilling.

Organized by Hands Across the Sand - a Florida-based movement founded even before the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon oil spill - protestors clasped hands in a line at noon at beaches throughout the United States and more than 20 other countries.

"The oil spill is a crisis ... and a wake-up call that we're the ones paying the price of offshore drilling," said Greg Lyon, chairman of the Palm Beach County chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, a national environmental organization that endorsed the event.

Lyon said more than 900 locations internationally participated in Saturday's event. That includes the Carlin Park protestors, about 750 people at the Lake Worth Pier, almost 300 people at the Jupiter Inlet and about 60 people in Palm Beach.

"It's really fulfilling to see the general public take a strong interest in the state of our environment," Lyon said.

At Carlin Park, some of the beachgoers who hadn't previously heard about the demonstration joined in on linking hands.

Catalina Arango and her 16-year-old daughter, Camila, who were on vacation from Bogota, Colombia, jumped into the line, still holding the Diet Coke cans they'd been sipping.

"We're against offshore drilling," Catalina Arango said. "Especially now with this big spill. We were concerned about the oil reports in Florida and our vacation, but we checked and saw it wasn't here yet, so we came."

Another mother-daughter pair joined hands near the Arangos. Melodie Malfa of Lake Worth said she cares about the environment and sent an e-mail about the protest to her mother, Ginny Malfa.

"This is my first demonstration," Ginny said proudly, hugging her daughter.

"This is a very accessible sort of demonstration," Melodie added. "It's the sort of thing that's easy for people to get involved with."

While other beachgoers watched, shading their eyes with their hands, the protestors at Carlin Park stood quietly, their backs to the ocean, for about 15 minutes. Some held signs with slogans like "We like our oceans blue, not black."

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Then, with a cheer and a few people clapping, the protest was over. People wandered away, some to find shade, others to relax on the beach.

But most said they felt good about doing something to draw a symbolic line in the sand against offshore drilling.

"I just have disgust with the way this whole oil spill mess is going," said Jane Leahy of Jupiter. "I'm glad to be here. It's a wonderful idea."

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