

## Project Records, Reports Conditions Along Coast

September 19, 2002

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### USF WEB SITE POSTS INFORMATION ONLINE

PORT RICHEY - Up-to-the-minute information about coastal conditions might save lives in Pasco County, as well as aid recreational boaters and people who fish for a living. For several months, the Coastal Ocean Monitoring Prediction System has been recording wind speed, wind direction and wind gusts along with the level and salinity of water, barometric pressure and air temperature on Pasco's coast. Now, that information is available to the public, meteorologists and emergency managers online at [comps.marine.usf.edu](http://comps.marine.usf.edu). The program, started in 1997, is a cooperative effort of the University of South Florida, the National Weather Service in Ruskin, Pasco County Emergency Management and Port Richey. This year, tide stations were installed near the coasts of Aripeka and Port Richey and a weather **buoy** was placed about 28 miles off Hudson. The towers along the coast and the **buoy** feed real-time information about the atmosphere and the Gulf of Mexico to meteorologists and emergency managers. Michele L. Baker, emergency management director, said the program will improve weather forecasting and the amount of warning people will get for severe weather and flooding along the coast. "In the long term, it would be extremely valuable," Baker said. "It's less about how we will use it directly than how we will use it down the road. It will improve the accuracy of flood warnings and coastal flooding predictions." She said prior to the coastal monitoring system being installed Pasco County had no official weather stations. Now, it does. Baker said weather officials can take the technical data and make better forecasts, which should lead to better warnings getting to the residents. "Maybe in the instances where they blow the forecast, with the data, we'll get some kind of warning," Baker said. Clifford Merz, director of the Coastal Ocean Monitoring Prediction System program at USF in St. Petersburg, said the high-tech recording instruments also will help with boating and fishing. He said people who use the Gulf will get used to visiting the Web site and will use the data as reference points. Information collected from the instruments mounted on the **buoy** also could aid in the cleanup of oil spills or other hazardous discharges in the Gulf because emergency workers will know the speed and direction of water flows. The information also could be used to help people searching for someone who might have fallen overboard into the Gulf, Merz said. "This is fairly unique," Merz said. "It's a regional one that is kind of a grass-roots program to provide the needs on the West Coast."