

# Local Defense Industry Buoy Recovery in Gulfport-Biloxi



Northrop Grumman shipyard  
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Gulfport-Biloxi, Mississippi gained uninvited fame when Hurricane Katrina ripped ashore in 2005. Beachfronts were leveled, bridges collapsed and the metropolitan area suffered billions of dollars in damage. In the years since, the state of Mississippi – which saw damage in all 82 counties – has been working hard to rebuild and revitalize across a variety of sectors, including the defense industry.

Gulfport-Biloxi, with a metro population of 234,997, make up the county seat of Harrison County, which is a part of the Gulf Coast. The Gulf-Coast I-10 corridor spans 300 miles across four states, and includes two dozen military installations. Gulfport is the second largest city in Mississippi, and the home of the U.S. Navy Seabees, the military construction arm of the U.S. Navy. Biloxi, located just east of Gulfport, is the home of Keesler Air Force Base.

The major military presence in the region has been a key part of growing the area post-Katrina. The military quickly went to work rebuilding, investing both dollars and personnel into the recovery efforts. Keesler Air Force Base alone spent close to \$1 billion on construction between

### Security-Cleared Earnings in Mississippi

Average Base Salary	\$55,533
Average Total Compensation	\$64,551

Source: 2011 ClearanceJobs Compensation Survey

Whether you're a rocket scientist or an oceanographer, there are security cleared jobs for you in the Gulfport-Biloxi region.

2006 and 2009. The U.S. Navy Seabees, located on the Naval Construction Battalion Center, played a major role in post-hurricane clean-up, deploying across the region to take part in the recovery effort.

Keesler Air Force Base is the largest employer in the region with more than 10,000 employees. In addition, 20,000 students are enrolled in the Air Force's training program in electronics and cybersecurity.

"The training in cyberspace operations, communication and computer systems, along with electronics and associated technologies, is extremely relevant to the Air Force's mission," said Brig. Gen. Andrew Mueller, commander of the 81st Training Wing at Keesler AFB.

Because of the importance of the mission and the evolving nature of cyber threats, Keesler maintains a close partnership with area companies, acquisitions elements and local universities in order to remain relevant in the face of emerging challenges.

The Naval Construction Battalion Center is one of the top 10 employers in Gulfport, with 4,900 active duty service members, 900 civilian personnel, and 150 contractors working directly for the center.

## Leading the growing geospatial market

The increasing importance of geospatial technology has also been good for the defense industry in the region. Stennis Space Center, established in the early 1960s and located within Hancock County, is a 14,000-acre NASA center that is also home to 30 federal and state agencies. The center employs 5,286 and has a 50-mile radius economic impact of \$691 million annually.

Stennis is NASA's program manager for rocket propulsion testing and is also home to the Naval Research Laboratory's Geospatial Sciences and Technology branch. Whether you're a rocket scientist or an oceanographer, there are security-cleared jobs for you at Stennis. More than 25 geospatial companies are located near Stennis, and the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Geospatial Center, specializing in geospatial information, research and applications, is located in Gulfport. As geospatial intelligence continues to increase in importance, job opportunities are expected to continue expanding.

"It's really a great success story for the region that they have these major military centers, doing some of the most cutting edge, highly skilled cleared jobs," said Evan Lesser, managing director of ClearanceJobs.com. "Cybersecurity and geospatial intelligence careers are at the beginning of what can only be expected to be a continued arc upward, and that's good news for both the defense industry and job prospects."

Advanced materials development – building composites and engineering materials for use in aerospace and shipbuilding – is another important industry in the Gulfport-Biloxi region. Gulfport is home to several companies with a focus on advanced materials, including Northrop Grumman's Center for Composite Excellence and United States Marine, Inc.

### Defense Contractors located in and around Gulfport-Biloxi

- BAE Systems
- Boeing
- European Aeronautics Defense and Space Co. EADS N.V.
- General Dynamics
- L-3 Communications
- Northrop Grumman
- Pratt & Whitney
- Raytheon Co.

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—Evan Lesser

Managing Director, ClearanceJobs.com

When it comes to defense contractors, it's difficult to think of a major defense contractor without a presence in or around Harrison County. Companies from Lockheed Martin and Pratt & Whitney to SAIC and QinetiQ are at work on the Gulf Coast. Security-cleared job opportunities range from geospatial intelligence and mechanical engineering to construction and shipbuilding.

In the past five years, Gulfport-Biloxi has worked hard to attract new businesses to the region with small business grants and tax exemptions. Other incentives include a low cost of living, and affordable energy and construction costs. Harrison County alone has more than 400 Department of Defense contractors. The county landed 2,529 contracts worth \$1 billion between 2000 and 2009, with Gulfport benefiting from \$744.5 million of that work.

The economic incentives make the region attractive for start-ups and small businesses. AGJ Systems and Networks of Gulfport is just one example. Founded by a team of three – including two veterans – it now does work in 24 states and four countries.



MSU Virtual Simulation Lab  
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## There's no better time than now

For individuals considering a move to Gulfport-Biloxi, there's probably no better time than now. While many communities are still rebuilding, much work has already been done. The average home price is just \$123,000, and with a low cost of living, beautiful beaches and a subtropical climate, it's an attractive place for many, including a large number of veterans. Nearly 18 percent of Harrison County residents are vets, one of the highest rates in the nation.

While a major natural disaster followed by a nation-wide economic downturn might leave other regions struggling for years to come, Gulfport-Biloxi is well-poised to see job growth and stabilization in the coming years, particularly in cleared professions. ★ ★ ★

### Career Opportunities in Gulfport/Biloxi

- Geospatial Analysis
- Cybersecurity
- Training/Education
- Test Engineer

### Highest Cleared Earnings Nationwide

Job Category	'11 Earnings
Program, Project Manager — Engineering	\$122,660
Program, Project Manager — Info Tech	\$115,702
Sales — Account Manager, Federal or Business Development	\$120,529
Info Tech — Software — Programming or Web Development	\$106,766
Policy or Public Affairs	\$107,499
Engineering — Aerospace or Aviation	\$103,733
Program, Project Manager — Other	\$102,910
Engineering — Electrical	\$95,182
Info Tech — Databases — Admin, Architect or Data	\$94,883
Info Tech — Testing — Test or QA	\$92,534

Source: 2011 ClearanceJobs Compensation Survey