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It might seem like a hairbrained scheme.

At least one salon in Tampa is gathering up shredded locks to be stuffed into makeshift booms to lasso the oil spill that has seeped into the Louisiana coast and was lurching toward Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. Dozens of other hair salons statewide are doing the same. But the plan is not as cut and dry as that. It's not as if there isn't plenty of hair.

Anthony Bellapigna, business manager of Michael Angelo Hair Studio in Tampa, says the business generates a pound of hair a day, and has a bag and a half ready to be shipped. And 25 other salons in Tampa are part of the program, and tens of thousands of pounds of follicles nationwide are good to go, said Lisa Gautier, president of Matter of Trust, the San Francisco, Ca., nonprofit organization behind the effort. There are also two locations in Florida -- one in Fort Walton Beach and another in Coral Gables -- where the hair can be stored until volunteers stuff it into nylons to create the oil stopgaps, Gautier said. It's just that Matter of Trust can't get its telephone calls returned by Unified Command, the collaborative structure of agencies thrown together to handle the national emergency. And Unified Command has to be involved because it decides where, or if, the boom is used, and it is its responsibility to drag the boom out of the water once it has served its purpose. "We would like for Unified Command to talk to us," Gautier said. Until then, the well-intentioned plan is in a state of limbo. The hair has to sit. "We're holding it right now," Bellapigna said. "They are going to give us a place to send it." There is another gnarl. While there is plenty of hair, there is a dearth of nylon, said Gautier.

She recommends everyone in Tampa drop off their nylons at those hair salons that work with Matter of Trust. "Runs are okay," she said. While Matter of Trust waits for Unified Command to call, there is volunteer work to be done, at least at those sites where warehouses or garages have been opened up to store the hair, Gautier said. "We're getting e-mails from surfers and beach bunnies," she said. "What we can do? What we can do?" You can help us make booms."



Michael Angelo Rizzi cuts 12-year-old Dallas Adams' hair at his salon in South Tampa. He saves customers' hair and donates it to Matter of Trust, which uses the hair to soak up oil spills all over the world.

