INTERNATIONAL SPILL CONTROL ORGANIZATION

ISCO NEWSLETTER

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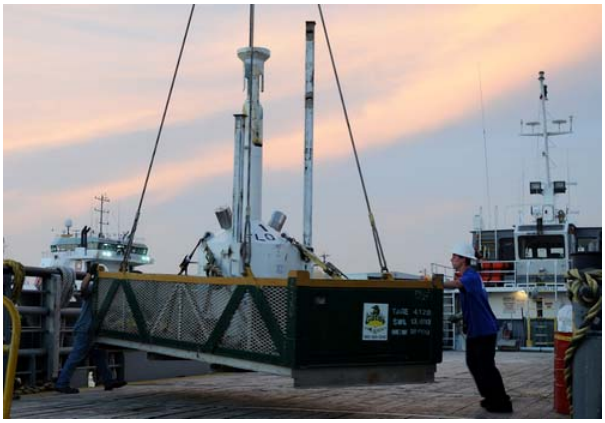
USA: DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL RELEASE UPDATE



A pollution containment chamber, known as the "top hat", is loaded onto the deck of the motor vessel Gulf Protector at Wild Well Control Inc. in Port Fourchon, La., May 10, 2010. The chamber is the second built by Wild Well Control and will be used in an attempt to contain an oil leak following the mobile offshore drilling unit Deepwater Horizon explosion. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Patrick Kelley.

Efforts to control the release of oil from the BP well in the Gulf of Mexico continue. Following on the hydrate formation problems that prevented successful operation of a larger 40' high coffer dam last week, a much smaller "top hat" containment chamber, designed to counter the hydrate problem, was lowered to the sea bed on May 12. However, its planned installation over the leak has, for the time being at least, been superceded by a project to insert a tube into the end of the broken riser that is the main source of oil being released. The latest news on this (Sunday May 16) is in a statement from Unified Command - "Overnight the Riser Insertion Tube Tool was successfully tested and inserted into the leaking riser, capturing some amounts of oil and gas. The oil was stored on board the Discoverer Enterprise drill ship 5,000 feet above on the water's surface, and natural gas was burned through a flare system on board the ship".

As a back-up in case this doesn't quite work out as hoped the installation of the "top hat" can be tried and there is another option – the so-called "junk shot" in which ground up materials from old tyres, etc. would be directly injected at high pressure directly into the BOP in the hope that the injected material will block the leak.

Meantime, the drilling of the first of two relief wells is said to be going well, with the drilling of a second well about to begin. If successful, a relief well will provide a permanent solution but completion will be some weeks away.

Sub-sea application of oil spill dispersant has now been formally approved by the EPA (subject to evaluation by continued monitoring) and appears to be very successful in dispersing oil and, as a bonus, the ratio of dispersant used to oil dispersed is very much better than that required for surface spraying.

In a worrying development a number of independent scientists, after studying videos of the subsea oil release, are saying that the amount of oil leaking could be at least five times as much as the current estimate of 5,000 bbl/day. Evidence of a much larger leak is not consistent with oil on the sea surface observations and this raises a question "where is the oil?" Part of the answer may be in a New York Times report (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/us/16oil.html) which says "Scientists are finding enormous oil plumes in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico, including one as large as 10 miles long, 3 miles wide and 300 feet thick in spots. The discovery is fresh evidence that the leak from the broken undersea well could be substantially worse than estimates that the government and BP have given." These plumes are said to be depleting the oxygen dissolved in the gulf, worrying scientists, who fear that the oxygen level could eventually fall so low as to kill off much of the sea life near the plumes.

The scale of the response effort continues to escalate. – Approximately 17,500 personnel are currently responding to protect the shoreline and wildlife; More than 600 vessels are responding on site, including skimmers, tugs, barges, and recovery vessels to assist in containment and cleanup efforts—in addition to dozens of aircraft, remotely operated vehicles, and multiple mobile offshore drilling units; More than 1.25 million feet of containment boom and 415,000 feet of sorbent boom

have been deployed to contain the spill—and approximately 270,000 feet of containment boom and 900,000 feet of sorbent boom are available; More than 6 million gallons of an oil-water mix have been recovered; Approximately 560,000 gallons of dispersant have been deployed. More than 260,000 gallons are available; 17 staging areas are in place and ready to protect sensitive shorelines.

Given the serious nature of the situation it is not surprising that President Obama has sent Congress a legislative package aimed to speed the response and aid to people affected by the spill, as well as "strengthen and update the oil spill liability system to better address catastrophic events," according to a press release. "No one in the administration will rest or be satisfied until the leak is stopped at the source and oil in the Gulf is contained and cleaned up and people in this region are able to get back to their lives and livelihood," Carol Browner, assistant to the president for Energy and Climate Change, said on May 14.

The legislation would (a) Increase the amount that could be spent from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund—an emergency cleanup fund the industry pays into—from $1 billion to $1.5 billion. (b) Raise the cap on natural resource damage assessments and claims from $500 million to $750 million. (c) Increase the tax that oil companies pay to finance the Trust Fund from 8 cents per barrel to 9 cents per barrel starting this year. (d) Give $2 million to the EPA, and $5 million to NOAA for various environmental studies that improve the federal response to the spill. (e) Give $2 million to the FDA to monitor seafood safety in the Gulf. (f) Give $29 million to the Interior Secretary to study the safety of offshore drilling

EUROPE: INVENTORY OF POLLUTION PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TRAINING CENTRES IN EUROPE

The main goal of this Inventory is to distribute knowledge between Member States (MS) regarding the existing European training centres, the type and topics covered as well as the level of these courses. This will allow MS to obtain additional information regarding training courses and centres existing in other states. In this way, depending on their needs, national response personnel will have more opportunities to be trained abroad.

For the purposes of the Inventory, preparedness and response to marine pollution is considered as it is defined in the OPRC Convention, therefore only those centres providing training in OPRC-related topics are included. The existing training centres offering and conducting response to chemical pollution (OPRC – HNS Protocol) are also subject of this investigation.

The report presents information for the training centres available in Europe offering and conducting training courses in the field of pollution preparedness and response. The Inventory covers all coastal MS as well as EFTA States and Candidate Countries. The document can be downloaded at: https://extranet.emsa.europa.eu/index.php?option=com_joomdoc&task=cat_view&Itemid=&gid=301&orderby=dmdate_published

U.S. TO SPLIT UP AGENCY POLICING THE OIL INDUSTRY

The Obama administration on Tuesday (May 11) proposed breaking up the agency responsible for both policing the oil industry and acting as its partner in drilling activities, seeking to end a decades-old relationship between industry and government that has proved highly profitable — and some say too cozy — for both.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said he planned to cut the agency that oversees the industry, the Minerals Management Service, in two. One office would be responsible for public safety and environmental enforcement and the other in charge of leasing and revenue collection. Details of the proposal are still being worked out. Read more: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/12/us/12interior.html

CHINA: NEW MARINE POLLUTION REGULATIONS

New regulations for the prevention and control of vessel-induced marine environmental pollution came into effect on 1st March, 2010.

A number of draft implementation documents have been released for comment and more are expected later this year. The latest issue of the CMS Newsletter published by China Marine Services Company gives more information and can be accessed at -
http://www.cmsonline.net/xmgl/UploadFiles/201043010533196.pdf

CMS has also published an unofficial translation of the new regulations, for information purposes only and with no acceptance of liability for its accuracy. For the spill response community the following are of particular interest –

“Article 33 The operators of the vessels carrying bulk liquids cargo with the pollution harmfulness and the other vessels with a gross tonnage of ten thousand tons or more shall reach the pollution clean-up agreements with the units qualified for pollution clean-up before the starting of the clean-up operations or entering or leaving the ports. The agreements shall clearly define the rights and obligations of both parties for the pollution clean-ups once the pollution accidents happened.”

“Article 34 The units who want to apply for and acquire the qualification of pollution clean-up shall make the application in writing to the Maritime Administrations and submit the following required documents: (1) The equipped pollution clean-up facilities, equipments, materials and personals are in compliance with the regulations of the Competent Authorities of Transport under the State Council. (2) The pollution clean-up plan formulated is in compliance with the requirements of the prevention and control of the pollution caused by vessels and its relevant operations. (3) The schemes for disposing the pollutants are in compliance with the relevant State regulations in respect of the prevention and control of the pollution.”

In essence, this means that relevant vessel operators are required to have contracts in place with approved spill response contractors. The complete version of the unofficial translation can be found at: http://www.cmsonline.net/xmgl/UploadFiles/201041516042332.pdf

TV SERIES SHOWS HAZARDS OF UNDERWATER OIL WORK

Deep sea divers who pull apart oil wells are getting the documentary TV treatment, and their hazardous job brings home a lesson now playing out in the Gulf of Mexico -- expect the unexpected. National Geographic Channel next week will air "Delta Divers," which by chance comes as experts in the Gulf of Mexico try to plug a ruptured underwater well threatening massive damage along the U.S. coast. The creators of the series told Reuters on Tuesday the divers they profile work at much shallower depths than the spewing well, which is about a mile underwater. But they said lessons from the series apply to the ongoing containment efforts in the Gulf of Mexico, where BP over the weekend tried and failed to cover the oil well with a huge metal box. "All the best laid plans go awry when you're out in the water," said Scott B, who produced, wrote and directed "Delta Divers," which debuts on May 19. He said his last name is a holdover from his days as a punk filmmaker. "Everything you do, when you're under an immense amount of water, is very tricky. It's like another world," he said. The "Delta Divers" work for subcontractors to oil companies, and generally are hired for routine work rather than emergencies. In one storyline, a team of divers works 125 miles out to sea to plug an aging oil well 300 feet below. They must snake an explosive charge into the well to cut its pipes and later plug them with concrete. But they hit problems, starting with mysterious bubbles that could carry potentially toxic gases that could kill a diver, a suspicion that is borne out later by tests. But the divers persevere. They stay clear of the bubbles and manage to stop up the well, and leave the ocean floor almost spotless when they leave. A diver can earn more than $1,500 a day, and the deeper they go the more they make. In another storyline, divers are sent to disassemble a giant oil rig that was toppled by a hurricane. They wrestle powerful underwater currents as they cut at the rig's metal supports and seek to avoid the threat of an underwater explosion from the build up of gases. Sandra Guthrie, a producer on "Delta Divers," said the barges where the crews work is a world unto itself. "It is the frontier and there are elements of it that seem like the Wild West, because of the unpredictability and the harshness," Guthrie said. "But at the same time, we witnessed enormous concern for the environment as well." National Geographic Channel is partly owned by News Corp. [Thanks to Don Johnston of ISCO Associate Member, DG & Hazmat Group for forwarding this story] http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory?id=10618788

UK: OUT OF THE DEPTHS COMES WAR'S LETHAL LEGACY

Environmentalists are becoming increasingly concerned that some of the thousands of wrecked ships around the globe, many of them along Britain's coastline and dating back to the Second World War, are ticking time bombs that could be about to wreak one final act of havoc.

Many of the vessels, which have lain almost forgotten at the bottom of the world's oceans for decades, were destroyed by enemy action or scuttled after the war. Some were oil tankers or supply ships packed with aviation fuel and ammunition. More than half are believed to be British. And now, as they rust away, they are starting to leak.

Such is the concern about war wrecks that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and Ministry of Defence have just completed compiling a database of every ship wrecked in Britain's coastal waters – they extend 200 miles out to sea – since 1870. Of the 9,905 wrecks catalogued, around a third are thought to be from the Second World War. Each is now to be individually risk assessed, Beccy Tye, the agency's deputy recorder of wrecks, said.

"There are still sections of the database to complete," she added. "So far it comes up with 12 per cent of the wrecks coming from the Second World War, but I think that's quite low. A lot of wrecks were unknown or unrecorded at the time. I would think the number is nearer to 30 per cent." Read the complete article at: http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/out-of-the-depths-comes-wars-lethal-legacy-1974574.html

USA: RESOLVE MARINE RECEIVES USCG APPROVAL FOR OPA 90 VSRP FUNDING AGREEMENT

ISCO Member, Resolve Marine Group (RESOLVE) has announced that they have received the U.S. Coast Guard's approval and recognition from the International Group of P&I clubs for their OPA 1990 Vessel Response Plan Salvage and Marine Firefighting Funding Agreement.

RESOLVE's Funding Agreement is the first OPA-90 mandated document of its kind to receive this combined international acceptance.

Under new requirements scheduled to go into full effect in February 2011, tank vessels carrying oil as cargo must submit a revised VRP to the Coast Guard in order to operate in U.S waters. Each VRP must be accompanied by a signed funding agreement committing a qualified salvage and marine firefighting resource provider to respond in the event that vessel suffers a casualty involving an oil spill or the substantial threat of a spill. http://www.maritime-executive.com/article/resolve-marine-recieves-uscg-approval-opa-90-vsrp-funding-agreement/

USA: CONTROLLED BURNING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

Stewart Ellis of Elastec/American Marine has sent in some photos of controlled burn operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

Company personnel have been assisting the U.S. Coast Guard, BP PLC and other federal agencies to aid in preventing the spread of oil following the April 20 explosion on the Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit, Deepwater Horizon.

They are currently on location at the spill with the company's patented Hydro-Fire® system carrying out training of personnel in deploying the fire resistant containment boom and passing it along to shrimp boats whose captains have been trained to tow it during in-situ burns. More info: http://www.elastec.com

UK: LLOYDS MARITIME ACADEMY MARINE POLLUTION SEMINAR UPDATE

As announced in issue 221 of the Newsletter (01/03/10), the seminar takes place in London over May 19-20 and provides legal, technical and practical update on handling oil and chemical incidents. Click here to download the agenda

Because of the high level of interest in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill the programme of the 2010 Marine Pollution Seminar has been revised to allow time for Charles B Anderson, Senior Vice President, Skuld North America, to give information on the ongoing response operations and discuss the legal issues arising out of the spill.

Following on the adoption of the Protocol to the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea, 1996 (see report in last week's Newsletter) Dr Rosalie Balkin, Director of Legal Affairs and External Relations, IMO will discuss the outcome of the International Conference on the Revision of the HNS Convention and address the difficulties that have been resolved and the issues that States will have to consider before ratification. More info: www.lloydsmaritimeacademy.com/marinepollution