INTERNATIONAL SPILL CONTROL ORGANIZATION

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DEEPWATER HORIZON: BAD WEATHER CONTINGENCY PLANS PUT TO THE TEST

On Wednesday July 21 the option to carry out a "Static Top Kill" was being discussed – not as a substitute for the permanent intercept procedure but as an interim measure that would actually assist the permanent solution. Admiral Allen advised "We'll probably have a good idea over the next 24 hours exactly what the detailed plan by BP will be to do that. The positive assertion is that with the pressure on top now, we can probably overcome the hydrocarbons that are in there and basically have the mud to seat the oil that's in the well bore, which we were not able to do with top kill because a lot of that mud was releasing out through the lower marine riser package.

By Thursday July 22 concerns heightened that a storm arising from a tropical depression – not a hurricane – could result in wave heights at the well site that would exceed the threshold that would trigger a decision to suspend operations. Later, on the evening of the same day, National Incident Commander, Admiral Thad Allen said "Due to the risk that Tropical Storm Bonnie poses to the safety of the nearly 2,000 people responding to the BP oil spill at the well site, many of the vessels and rigs will be preparing to move out of harm's way beginning tonight. This includes the rig drilling the relief well that will ultimately kill the well, as well as other vessels needed for containment. Some of the vessels may be able to remain on site, but we will err on the side of safety."

The next morning, Friday July 23, it was confirmed that The Development Driller II, Development Driller III and the Q4000 are demobilizing or detaching and recovering equipment right now. Other vessels, including skimming boats, were already moving to shelter but the ROV vessels would remain (subject to weather) in order to continue monitoring of the well head. Most importantly, a decision was made to leave the cap in place, thus ensuring that no oil would be released.

On Saturday July 24, In response to a question, NOAA Administrator Dr. Jane Lubchenco said "We expect that Bonnie should help dissipate and weather the oil that's at the surface. It will spread the surface slick out and thereby lower oil concentrations. It's expected to break tar patches and tar mass into smaller tar balls which means faster weathering and faster natural biodegradation," she said. "It will also cause more natural dispersion, again lowering the concentration of oil in the water and making it more available to the natural bacteria that are in the water that do this natural biodegradation." Admiral Allen provided an update on pressure readings of the wellhead. "As of last night at midnight, we had 6,891 pounds per square inch pressure. This was an increase of 14 pounds per square inch over the last 24 hour time period," he said. "So we continue having integrity at the well head. The pressure continues to slowly rise."

Admiral Allen also discussed estimated timelines for resuming preparations for the static kill and relief well drilling operations once the equipment is reconnected. "I think probably within 48 hours, they'll be able to start relaying that casing which is the final piece of pipe they have to put into the well bore, and then once that casing is in place, they will put some cement around it to hold it. While that cement is drying, within 48 hours, they will be able to begin the hydrostatic top kill putting the mud down the top of the well," he said. "It will probably take somewhere between five and seven days for that cement to dry and for them to be in position to be able to actually drill into the well annulus itself. So if you add all that up we're probably looking at somewhere between seven to ten days before we would be able to start the well intercept after the Development Driller III is on scene and has latched up."

CHINA: DALIAN SEEKS TO CONTAIN OIL PIPELINE SPILL

Oil pipelines and equipment in Dalian, Liaoning province, lie damaged after an explosion on July 16, 2010. [China Daily]

July 19 - An oil pipeline exploded at 6 pm on Friday near Dalian's Xingang Harbor, triggering another blast at a smaller pipe nearby, Xinhua News Agency reported. Both pipelines, owned by China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), caught fire. Firefighters put out the blaze at the larger pipeline at around midnight. But at least five subsequent explosions fueled the fire at the smaller pipeline.

More than 2,000 firefighters fought the blaze and most of the fire was put out on Saturday morning, 15 hours after the initial explosion, Xinhua reported.

After the fires were extinguished, workers began using oil skimmers and dispersants to contain the oil slick from spreading beyond the port into the Yellow Sea. By Sunday evening, about 7,000 meters of floating booms had been set up and at least 20 oil skimmers were working to clean the spill, the Liaoning provincial maritime safety bureau said. More: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/19/content_10121115.htm

Update: July 21 - China's largest reported oil spill more than doubled in size to 165 sq. miles (430 sq. kilometers) by Wednesday, forcing nearby beaches to close and prompting one official to warn of a "severe threat" to sea life and water quality. The amount of oil spilled in the explosion was still not clear Wednesday, though China Central Television earlier reported an estimate of 1,500 tons. Though the slick has continued to expand, it covered a 70-sq.-mile (180-sq.-kilometer) stretch earlier this week, officials maintain no more oil was leaking into the Yellow Sea. Read more: http://www.philly.com/philly/wires/ap/business/20100721_ap_officialseverethreataschinaoilspillgrows.html#ixzz0uPHwkp1W Watch sports videos you won't find anywhere else

Update: July 23 - Chinese investigators say weak safety procedures and chaotic management contributed to an oil pipeline explosion and spill that is fouling a large stretch of the Yellow Sea. The State Administration of Work Safety said Friday in Beijing that workers erred by continuing to pour a chemical agent into a pipeline after a tanker had stopped unloading crude at the port of Dalian last week. A preliminary official report found there was no safety procedure for adding the agent, which is used to strip sulfur from oil. It said that after the accident, systems malfunctioned, management was chaotic and work flows were “not smooth.” China has ordered ports across the country to create emergency response teams and to hold regular safety drills in response to the accident. A vital oil terminal at Dalian remains shut and an oil slick still covers 430 square kilometers of ocean off China’s northeast coast. More: http://asia.getsomenews.com/2010/07/chemical-agent-blamed-in-chinese-oil-spill-27652

VENEZUELA: CRUDE SPILLS MAR VENEZUELA OIL HUB LAKE MARACAIBO

Waste Oil And Garbage Are Seen On The Shores Of Lake Maracaibo. Oil floats on the surface close to oil facilities at the Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela's western state of Zulia July 7, 2010. The area has been blighted in recent weeks by several leaks from the tangle of antiquated pipes, pumps and other oil installations that crisscross the lake, one of the oldest energy hubs in the Latin American OPEC member.

State oil company PDVSA blames the latest leaks on thieves vandalizing facilities, and says last week it recovered a large amount of equipment stolen from the lake. Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez downplays the spills, saying they only amount to a tiny eight barrels per day (bpd). Western Zulia state in which Lake Maracaibo is located produces 80O,000 bpd of Venezuela's 2.9 million bpd output, according to the government. Ramirez concedes that the situation in Lake Maracaibo is "chronic", with abandoned machinery and thousands of miles of pipelines snaked "like spaghetti" on its bed. "We have taken out more than 100,000 tonnes of scrap, and repair 117 leaks each week," Ramirez told state television. The latest spills were first detected early in June, but were initially denied by PDVSA. It

later acknowledged there was a problem after local media broadcast images of the leaks. It has now hired hundreds of fishermen for cleanup operations. Eliseo Fermin, head of the legislative council of Zulia state, estimated that slicks from the latest leaks were now affecting 8 percent of the surface of the lake. "The pipelines are completely perforated," Fermin said. You can read the unabridged article at http://planetark.org/wen/58750 [Thanks to Don Johnston of ISCO Associate Member, DG & Hazmat Group, for providing the link to this report]

TECHNOLOGY: MERMAID OPENS PROSPECT OF CLEANER SEAS WITH POLLUTION EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Within the framework of MERMAID – Marine Environmental Remote-controlled Measuring And Integrated Detection – an international team of scientists and engineers developed automatic sensors and analyzers, mounted on a network of radio-controlled stations, to sample, measure and record chemical and biological changes to water. The project later became one of the cornerstones of the intergovernmental GOOS, Global Ocean Observing System.

Initially, three prototype stations were sited in the North Sea around Germany's Elbe River estuary. Yet the project's real achievement was to lay the foundations for reliable, widespread monitoring systems that provide accurate early warning of pollution, allowing marine authorities to take timely counter-measures.

Before MERMAID, most marine monitoring was hit-and-miss, dependant on infrequent ship water-sampling voyages, and laboratory analyses performed weeks, even months later – far too late for effective actions. Some automated systems in the North Sea measured parameters such as salinity and temperature, but they were incapable of recording the all-revealing chemical and biological profile of water.

MERMAID harnessed the latest computer and communications technology to provide near real-time assessment of water quality and conditions for potentially the entire North Sea and other large bodies of water. [With acknowledgement to Pollution Online Newsletter] Read the complete article at: http://www.pollutiononline.com/article.mvc/MERMAID-Opens-Prospect-Of-Cleaner-Seas-With-0001?user=2116810&source=nl:28135

USA: FLORIDA STATE INVESTIGATES HOW FAST MICROBES CAN BREAK DOWN OIL IN GULF BEACH SANDS

A new Florida State University study is investigating how quickly the Deepwater Horizon oil carried into Gulf of Mexico beach sands is being degraded by the sands' natural microbial communities, and whether native oil-eating bacteria that wash ashore with the crude are helping or hindering that process.

What oceanography professors Markus Huettel and Joel E. Kostka learn will enable them to predict when most of the oil in the beaches will be gone. Their findings may also reveal ways to accelerate the oil degradation rate — and speed matters, because toxic crude components that remain buried on Gulf Coast beaches may seep into the groundwater below. Read more: http://www.pollutiononline.com/article.mvc/Florida-State-Investigates-How-Fast-Microbes-0001?user=2116810&source=nl:28020

OIL FIRMS PLAN RAPID-RESPONSE FORCE

July 22 - Four of the world's largest oil companies are creating a strike force to stanch oil spills in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico in a billion-dollar bid to regain the confidence of the White House after BP PLC's disaster.

Exxon Mobil Corp., Chevron Corp., Royal Dutch Shell PLC and ConocoPhillips said Wednesday that they are forming a joint venture to design, build and operate a rapid-response system to capture and contain up to 100,000 barrels of oil a day flowing 10,000 feet below the surface of the sea.

The new system, consisting of several oil-collection ships and an array of subsurface containment equipment, resembles the one developed by BP during three months of trial and error after its leased rig exploded April 20, unleashing the worst offshore oil spill in U.S. history. But the companies say it will be ready to go at all times and can be used on the wide variety of equipment found in the deepwater Gulf.

BP, which is still engaged in its prolonged effort to permanently stop the resulting oil spill and clean it up, wasn't asked to join the strike-force consortium. "We don't want to distract them at all," said Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon, which is leading the system's engineering and construction.

The companies will evenly split an initial investment of $1 billion in the nonprofit venture, which they are calling the Marine Well Containment Co. But the tab to build the system and have crews on alert for years could run in the billions of dollars.

The containment system will be designed to deal with well blowouts and is expected to be ready within 18 months, Exxon said. The response team should be able to start mobilizing within 24 hours of an oil spill, and be fully in place within weeks, said Sara Ortwein, vice president of engineering for Exxon Mobil Development Co. Read the complete text of this article at: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704684604575381422950478384.html

USA: HOUSE PASSES LEGISLATION TO BOOST SPILL RESPONSE

July 21 - The House of Representatives today unanimously passed two proposals designed to boost oil spill cleanup technology and lower the environmental risks of offshore drilling -- the first spill-related legislation to advance out of the House or Senate in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

One of the measures aims to speed the development of new technologies to clean up and contain oil spills. Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D- Calif., the bill sponsor, complained that the booms, chemical dispersants and skimmers being used to trap and break up crude in the Gulf of Mexico today are virtually unchanged from the technology used after the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaskan waters in 1989.

The legislation would expand a 20-year-old interagency oil spill research and development program that was created after the Exxon Valdez spill. Under the House-passed bill, the program could get $48 million annually to assess the current oil spill response technology and fund research to improve it.

The other bill passed by the House on Wednesday would overhaul a five-year-old program designed to promote research into more efficiently extracting oil and gas from deep ocean waters. Although the Obama administration proposed axing that deep-water drilling research program earlier this year as a way of saving $50 million annually, the House-passed bill would revive the initiative with a new emphasis on funding research into safety and accident prevention.

With the proposed changes, the drilling program would devote roughly a third of its resources to studying accident prevention and safety measures for drilling in water depths of 1,000 feet or more -- rather than the 5,000-foot threshold in current law. Read more at: http://blogs.chron.com/newswatchenergy/archives/2010/07/house_passes_le.html

PAKISTAN: AGREEMENT TO SIGN RESPONSE CO-OPERATION AGREEMENT WITH SACEP MEMBERS

July 13 - Pakistan is to sign an oil and chemical pollution contingency plan MoU with member states of South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), official sources told *Business Recorder* here on Monday. SACEP is an inter-governmental organisation, established in 1982 by the governments of South Asia, to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the region. SACEP member countries include Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Pakistan ratified the international convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation, 1990 (OPRC Convention) on May 13, 1995. The convention facilitates international co-operation and mutual assistance in preparing for and responding to major oil pollution incidents and encourages states to develop and maintain an adequate capability to deal with oil pollution emergencies. The convention requires that the parties establish a national system to respond promptly and effectively to oil pollution incidents.

The plan, which is an integral part of the MoU calls for establishing a mechanism for mutual assistance under which the competent national authorities of member countries will co-operate to co-ordinate and integrate their response to marine pollution incidents occurring in their territorial seas and internal waters, which may affect or likely to affect the marine environment. In case of a major marine pollution incident, the parties will co-operate in taking, individually or jointly, the necessary remedial measures according to the principles set out in the regional plan.

The parties will also exchange information on relevant research and development programmes. The sources said, cabinet in its meeting held on March 24, 2010 accorded ex-post facto approval in principle to start negotiations with the member states of SACEP on regional oil and chemical pollution contingency plan for South Asia and MoU. The sources further said draft plan and the MoU were sent to the Ministry of Law for vetting which has cleared the draft MoU and the plan. Read more at: http://www.brecorder.com/index.php?id=1079828&currPageNo=2&query=&search=&term=&supDate=

USA & CANADA: COAST GUARDS SIGN POLLUTION AGREEMENT

The United States and Canadian Coast Guards signed an annex to the Canadian/United States Atlantic (CANUSLANT) Joint Marine Pollution Contingency Plan June 29, 2010. The Atlantic Geographic Annex covers the Atlantic marine boundary between Canada and the United States, defines the CANUSLANT Joint Response Team, and is regularly tested and improved in an ongoing series of CANUSLANT exercises. Its purpose is to augment and link the pollution response systems and plans in each nation to facilitate an efficient joint response to a cross-border spill.

Rear Admiral Daniel Neptun, commander First Coast Guard District, and Ms. Nancy Hurlburt, assistant commissioner maritimes region, Canadian Coast Guard, signed the annex which allows both nations to work seamlessly in the event of the pollution incident in the boundary waters of Canada and the United States. http://coastguardnews.com/coast-guards-sign-pollution-agreement/2010/07/16/

NETHERLANDS: TRAFIGURA FINED €1M FOR EXPORTING TOXIC WASTE TO AFRICA

The oil trader Trafigura has been fined Euro1m (£840,000) for illegally exporting tonnes of hazardous waste to west Africa. It is the first time the London-based firm has been convicted of criminal charges over the environmental scandal, in which 30,000 Africans were made ill when the toxic waste was dumped in Ivory Coast A court in the Netherlands also ruled today that the firm had concealed the dangerous nature of the waste when it was initially unloaded from a ship in Amsterdam.

Eliance Kouassi, president of the victims' group in Ivory Coast, said: "Finally Trafigura has been called out in a court of law. It's a real victory for us." The fine is, however, only half the amount sought by the Dutch prosecutors. More: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/23/trafigura-dutch-fine-waste-export

PUBLICATIONS: IPIECA OIL SPILL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE REPORT SERIES SUMMARY

This summary publication brings together the complete *Oil spill report series* under one cover. It provides a complete overview of issues that can be referenced in the preparation for, and response to, oil spills at sea. The core content of this publication is made up of report summaries which reference the full report series.
Download PDF (English, 4.14 MB) Also available in other languages: http://www.ipieca.org/publication/oil-spill-preparedness-and-response-report-series-summary

AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM ON DEEPWATER HORIZON SPILL

The American Chemical Society (ACS) will hold a special day-long symposium on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on Tuesday, Aug. 24 during its National Meeting & Exposition. The symposium, which includes almost a dozen experts, will examine topics ranging from the spill's effects on marine life to its effects on the safety of seafood. It will take place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Room 210C of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, followed by an open-discussion session from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"The goal of the symposium is to gather people with different skills and backgrounds, including leaders in the field of oil spill chemistry, in an effort to study the oil spill and hopefully find out how to turn it around," explained co-organizer Kermit Murray, Ph.D. He is a professor of chemistry at Louisiana State University (LSU). "The oil spill is a cross-disciplinary problem in which chemistry plays a key role in finding solutions." More info: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-07/acs-acs072010.php

IRELAND: ISAA STEERING GROUP AND TRAINING DAYS DATES ANNOUNCED

The next meeting of the ISAA All-Ireland Scheme Steering Group will be at 1030 hrs on Tuesday 10th August at the Irish Coastguard HQ in Dublin. All interested stakeholders are invited to attend. The Meeting Agenda will be issued later this week.

The ISAA 2010 Training Days event will be held over the days Wednesday 15th September and Thursday 16th September at Castle Archdale Country Park, near Enniskillen. Details of the programme, booking form and other information will sent out soon.