

OSPRAG moves ahead rapidly



Summer 2011 is proving to be a busy one in the UK oil and gas industry's efforts to strengthen its oil spill prevention and response capabilities. Here, we advise readers of the strides that have been made in the last few months by operators, contractors, the regulators and trade unions working together through the UK Oil Spill Prevention and Response Advisory Group (OSPRAG).

Sharing experience of well control to prevent oil spills

The very first job of OSPRAG was to review the industry's well blowout prevention practices. This centred on well examination and verification, primary well control, blow-out preventers, competency, behaviours and human factors. While this work concluded that there is a high degree of confidence in the UK regulatory regime and that it drives the right safety and environmental behaviours, it was decided that the good practices identified during the review should be shared throughout the industry.

Consequently, a formal and active body was formed through which well life cycle cross industry issues can be identified and reviewed and best practice shared. The body, known as the Well Life Cycle Practices Forum (WLCPF), currently involves over 60 people in six workgroups. The groups are focusing on blowout preventer issues, relief well planning requirements, well life cycle integrity guidelines, well examination, verification and competency, behaviours and human factors.

Simultaneously, the WLCPF is continuing to monitor and review information from the Macondo incident last year, ensuring that any pertinent recommendations are considered in the workgroups' projects.



As a permanent group administered by Oil & Gas UK, the WLCPF will ensure the industry continues on the path of improvement long after OSPRAG, which was set up as a temporary focus group, has been disbanded.

Jim House, OSPRAG's chairman and regional vice president and managing director of Apache North Sea Ltd, said: "The Well Life Cycle Practices Forum will bring together knowledge and experience from across the industry with regards to best practice in well design, construction and operation. The new forum will also provide a permanent mechanism for continued improvement in this area."

For more information on the WLCPF, please contact Theo Tucker on ttucker@oilandgasuk.co.uk.

Training to enhance oil pollution emergency planning

It is a statutory requirement for all operations to be covered by a DECC-approved Oil Pollution Emergency Plan (OPEP), which sets out

contingency arrangements. Operators must ensure that the oil spill response strategy in their OPEP equates to the assessment of the worst case scenario.

In order to help companies satisfy their own OPEP requirements, and that of the regulators, Oil & Gas UK held four OPEP workshops in May. These provided attendees with an update of the progress of the counter pollution toolkit, being developed to comprise the response options utilised during the Macondo incident, and what an operator should do to incorporate the relevant elements of the toolkit in an OPEP. These workshops proved highly successful and were attended by over 140 practitioners and senior executives from more than 60 companies.

For more information, please contact Mick Borwell at mborwell@oilandgasuk.co.uk.

Testing emergency response procedures

Although confidence in blowout prevention measures is high, the industry recognises the importance of regularly testing its emergency response capabilities in order to improve these systems in readiness for a real-life scenario, however unlikely. It is therefore demonstrating its ability to respond to major offshore incidents through a series of large-scale exercises this summer.

Exercise SULA, organised by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the Department

of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), was run on 18 and 19 May 2011 to test the National Contingency Plan for oil spill response.

Also participating were Chevron Upstream Europe, Oil Spill Response, Stena Offshore, Briggs Environmental, Braemar Howells, BP (Sullom Voe terminal), Shetland Islands Council, Marine Scotland, Hess, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Northern Constabulary, Scottish Natural Heritage, Foods Standards Agency, Scottish Fisheries Association, Oil & Gas UK and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.



The scenario depicted the uncontrolled release of hydrocarbons into the sea from a deepwater well operated by Chevron Upstream Europe at the Cambo Well Site, 86 miles west of Shetland. The focus of role play on day one was on the emergency response centres set up at both Chevron's and MCA's Aberdeen headquarters. Exercise players tested subsea well control response capability, command and control functions, and the counter pollution response used to control an ongoing oil spill.

The second day of the exercise focused on Shetland and involved a physical response to a scenario involving an oil spill reaching the shoreline. Despite testing weather conditions in Shetland, there was a successful deployment of aerial and vessel dispersant, shoreline protection and at-sea containment and recovery methods.



Oil & Gas UK's supply chain director and leader of OSPRAG's Technical Review Group, Brian Kinhead, said: "Shetland was chosen not just because of its unique situation and often challenging

meteorological conditions, but because of the west of Shetland's strategic importance to future oil and gas deepwater developments there.

"The UK oil and gas industry has given strong support to Exercise SULA. It was run to test the national contingency plan for marine pollution and for the industry to demonstrate its ability to respond to a major deepwater well control incident and resulting oil spill. Oil & Gas UK will ensure learning from this exercise is subsequently shared among its members for the benefit of the oil and gas industry."

Film footage of elements of Exercise SULA is available at http://www.youtube.com/user/oilandgasuk?feature=creators_corner-http%3A//s.ytimg.com/yt/img/creators_corner/Watch_me_on_YouTube/90x15_watchon_blue.png.

In a separate exercise taking place this summer, the UK oil and gas industry tests its ability to deploy a capping device and to use subsea dispersant in the waters west of Shetland. The exercise will not involve the actual OSPRAG well capping device, the manufacturing of which was brought to readers' attention in the April issue of Wireline, because its construction is not yet complete, but a device of the same size and weight as the cap. This will provide an accurate simulation of the process of transporting it, loading it onto a vessel and lowering it over the side before fixing it to a specially-built simulated well on the sea floor.

For more information on these exercises, please contact Theo Tucker on ttucker@oilandgasuk.co.uk.

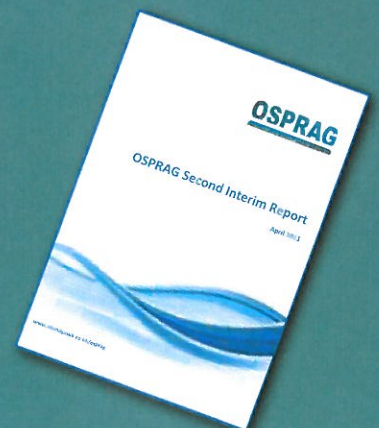
Co-operating across borders in emergencies

Also successfully tested in May was the Operators Co-operative Emergency Services (OCES) system. The cross-border agreement provides a framework under which oil and gas companies operating in the North Sea and adjacent waters on the north west European continental shelf work together to share resources should the need arise.

The exercise on 3 May tested the principles and practices under which emergency assistance is given, received and remunerated and involved operators, members of North Sea trade associations, UK regulators and Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Many learning points were identified about the use of OCES in a practical situation and will be fed into the current review of the OCES agreement.

For more information, please contact Louise Ryan on lryan@oilandgasuk.co.uk.

Readers can find details of recent progress made by OSPRAG at <http://www.oilandgasuk.co.uk/knowledgecentre/Progressreports.cfm>.



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