



Minerals Management Service

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News Release

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MMS Gulf Region Observes 20th Anniversary of Spill Drill Program

Drill program continues to validate offshore operators' preparedness to respond.

NEW ORLEANS – Minerals Management Service (MMS) Director Liz Birnbaum today highlighted the 20th anniversary of the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region's Unannounced Oil Spill Drill Program. The first unannounced drill with an offshore oil and gas operator in the Gulf was held on July 25, 1989.

Since the first unannounced drill, an additional 273 drills have been held in the Gulf. The MMS designs the drill to exercise an oil and gas and pipeline operator's Oil Spill Response Plan and evaluates its spill management team's effectiveness in responding to a simulated spill event.

"While preventing oil spills is our top priority throughout the offshore energy exploration and extraction process, operators must be ready to respond to a spill event," Birnbaum said. "The Unannounced Drill Program enables MMS to monitor and enhance the operators' response capabilities throughout the Outer Continental Shelf."

In order to test an operator's ability and effectiveness in responding, there are different methods used in a drill. A drill may consist of a table top exercise or the actual deployment of specific response equipment such as oil spill response vessels and dispersant aircraft. Every drill tests an operator's ability to notify the appropriate contacts including federal regulatory agencies, affected state and local agencies, internal response coordinators and response contractors, as well as an operator's ability to make decisions, respond properly, and take appropriate action.

As part of the 20th anniversary observance, MMS has made available its 250th *Unannounced Oil Spill Drill in the Gulf of Mexico* DVD on the MMS Web site, www.mms.gov. The DVD chronicles the 250th unannounced drill, which took place in October 2007 and involved a major oil and gas production facility in the Gulf of Mexico. As part of the drill, the operator was required to deploy its aerial dispersant aircraft.

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