

Transcript

Minerals Management Service 250th Unannounced Oil Spill Drill in the Gulf of Mexico

[Intro Music]

Narrator: Each day offshore oil and gas operators produce 1.3 million barrels of oil and 8 billion cubic feet of natural gas from the Gulf of Mexico.

Narrator: This is done through a network of 4,000 oil and gas structures in the Gulf ranging from single-well caissons in ten feet of water to highly complex state-of-the-art facilities operating in water depths greater than 6,000 feet. This energy production is conducted in a safe and environmentally sound manner.

Narrator: Minerals Management Service makes sure of this. A federal agency within the Department of Interior, MMS manages the energy and mineral resources on the Nation's Outer Continental Shelf.

Lars Herbst: "MMS experiences a fantastic safety and environmental record within the Gulf of Mexico. This is due in large part to our engineering review, our inspections that are conducted on equipment and also the oil spill contingency planning that is conducted."

Lars Herbst: "As part of MMS's review, we ensure that the operator submits an oil spill contingency plan. Within that plan, we review the equipment that any operator would have at hand ready to use for oil spill response. Then we follow that up with inspections in the field of that oil response equipment."

Narrator: "MMS also conducts Unannounced or 'surprise' drills on the operator. In the fall of 2007, the 250th unannounced drill in the Gulf of Mexico was held."

Rusty Wright: (Phone Rings) "Control, this is Bo. Hello Bo, this is Rusty Wright with the MMS This is a drill, this is a drill this is a drill, we are going to conduct an unannounced oil spill drill on your facility and I'm going to give you the ground rules and the scenario."

Rusty Wright: "I just initiated the 250th drill with Shell Offshore, I called the URSA platform and gave the scenario to the lead operator out there telling them about a well control issue that would put oil in the water so we can exercise our regional oil spill response plan."

Rusty Wright: “The next step is we are going to go to the Incident Command Post and watch Shell put together their spill management team and respond to the scenario. They are going to deploy a dispersant airplane out of Coolidge, Arizona and a plane out of Stennis, Mississippi to go offshore and in this case spray water to simulate spraying dispersant on the oil spill.”

Narrator: Every drill tests two components: one - an operator’s ability to notify the appropriate contacts including federal regulatory agencies, affected state and local agencies, internal coordinators and response contractors, and two - an operator’s ability to make the decisions, respond properly, and take appropriate action.

Tommy Hutto: “We’ll ramp up our command post as if it was a real event, we will generate our 201s and we’ll generate our meeting schedule and we’ll perform as if it was an actual event.”

Ben Bensen: “Roger on that, received a call from Tommy Hutto at 3:33 this morning regarding the incident. I return activated MSRC at 03:45 I activated the dispersant process which is the C-130 out of Arizona and the King Air out of Stennis, in Mississippi.

I also simulated the activation of Louisiana Responder and the Mississippi Responder and I have the ETAs on both the responders which is Louisiana at 13:30 this afternoon and the Mississippi at 23:30 this evening. We are still working on the estimated time of arrivals for the dispersant process and also working on the dispersant inventory that’s available to us.

I am working with Logistics right now on surveillance – he does have helicopters available down at our shore base in Fourchon, he will give me the tail numbers and the number of aircraft that we have available and we’ll get spotters and surveillance people loaded on board at that time. And that’s all that I can report out for Operations.”

Narrator: All offshore operators are required to have a response company under contract to respond to any oil spill that may occur. They maintain the response equipment and train the crews required to operate the equipment. This is the most efficient method in order to ensure that necessary response equipment is available for all offshore operators to use in the Gulf. As part of its Oil Spill Program, MMS inspects the equipment regularly to ensure it is ready for deployment at any time.

Tommy Hutto: “Our understanding is that we will fly and drop water at the location that you are going to give us later..At Stennis they will have those coordinates that you want that drop.”

Narrator: This particular drill tested the operator’s ability to deploy its dispersant aircraft. While bad weather prevented the aircraft from actually spraying the mock

dispersant. The C-130 was flown to the staging area and the spray wings were attached as would have been done in an actual response.

Narrator: MMS uses these drill opportunities not only to review the responders' ability to activate their equipment but also to inspect that the equipment is being maintained.

Alton Bates: "From my perspective, I'm here annually unannounced but there is a program in regulations that require the spill responders to maintain their equipment on a weekly basis, they have to maintain their equipment. They have to deploy the equipment on a monthly basis. For aircraft, take them out and fly them as if and go through the same routine as if they were responding to an actual spill - go to some site. In the case of inspection, they load up with water and (decant) the water . . ."

Narrator: From setting up a command center to deploying equipment, operators are expected to be ready to respond to any situation in a drill. They follow the protocol set-up in the National Incident Management System as required by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Commander Joe Jenicek, USCG: "Today, I am here as a participant in a Shell unannounced spill drill. My primary role here is to act as what the Coast Guard would be involved if there was a real spill. I also provide a lot of technical information from experience on what the Coast Guard would expect during an actual incident and also what the resources and capabilities are for the Coast Guard to respond and get our resources out on scene."

Narrator: Through the drill program, MMS ensures that operators execute their plans effectively and that the necessary response equipment is available and ready as needed. In an actual response, MMS staff serves a different role.

Frank Patton, MMS: "In a real situation, the inspector would fly out there to see the extent and severity of the spill and if possible would land on the platform to ensure that the spill source had been shut-in and also to observe any other activities that would be taking place offshore at the sight of the spill."

Rusty Wright, MMS: "The MMS drill program is designed to test operators' plans. The operators are required to submit plans to us and we review and approve those plans and part of our process is to test the plans. In the past we have been doing up to 25 of these drills per year to test the plans. If the operators don't properly respond to a spill, we will INC the operator and they'll have to fix whatever problems they have and then we'll go back and re-drill that operator again to make sure they've fixed the problems they needed to fix."

Narrator: Initiated in 1989, the Unannounced Drill Program is active in each of the three MMS Regions. In 2007, 44 unannounced drills were conducted throughout the Alaska, Gulf of Mexico and Pacific Regions.

Rusty Wright, MMS: “I’d like to commend Shell on a successful drill. This exercise started about 15 hours ago. They brought together a very well-oiled machine with contractors and in-house talent and did a great job.”

Narrator: Through the MMS mission of managing the energy and minerals resources on the Outer Continental Shelf, the unannounced drill program will continue far past the 250th drill ensuring that oil and gas operators are prepared and ready to respond as they go about their work developing the Nation’s offshore energy production