

## **THE OCEAN ENERGY SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Deepwater Horizon incident highlighted significant shortcomings in offshore drilling safety practices, the lack of preparedness on the part of industry to contain a deepwater blowout in a timely manner, and our reliance on outdated oil spill response equipment and procedures. For 30 years, as oil and gas companies ventured into deeper waters in the Gulf of Mexico and developed more sophisticated drilling technologies, safety practices and equipment trailed behind.

In the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon, many have recognized the need for more collaboration among government, industry, and academia on issues related to offshore energy safety, including workplace and drilling safety, blowout containment and spill response.

To this end, the Secretary of the Interior proposed creating an Ocean Energy Safety Advisory Committee (Safety Committee), a collaborative initiative among government, industry, academia and outside experts, which will advise on matters and actions relating to offshore energy safety, including, but not limited to drilling and workplace safety, well intervention and containment, and oil spill response. The Committee will also facilitate collaborative research and development, training and execution in these and other areas relating to offshore energy safety. The Safety Committee may advise on matters submitted to the Safety Committee by the Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (Director). The Safety Committee is established in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

### **I. The Mission of the Ocean Energy Safety Advisory Committee**

The Safety Committee will be a government-created and sponsored center of excellence that will draw together U.S. government agencies, the offshore energy industry, national laboratories, non-governmental organizations, and the academic community to provide recommendations on new safety regulations, cutting-edge R&D technological development, application and training in the areas of offshore drilling safety, containment and oil spill response.

Some of the objectives of the Safety Committee will include:

- Providing a venue for representatives from industry, government, NGOs, national laboratories, and the academic community to exchange information and ideas, share best practices, and develop cross-organizational expertise on issues related to offshore energy safety;
- Cataloguing existing R&D initiatives related to offshore energy safety, including drilling and workplace safety, containment and oil spill response;
- Identifying, prioritizing and recommending new R&D projects in the areas of drilling and workplace safety, containment, and oil spill

response and recommending an allocation of available resources to these projects as appropriate;

- Conducting a full-system risk and reliability analysis for the offshore environment; and
- Creating an enduring R&D collaboration and a readily-available expertise base useful both for preventing and responding to accidents.
- Providing advice on how best to stand up the proposed Ocean Energy Safety Institute, and on what role the Safety Committee should play in the Institute going forward.

The Safety Committee may establish technical working groups to focus on critical areas related to offshore drilling, such as:

- A Drilling and Workplace Safety Working Group that will make recommendations, hold workshops and focus on issues relating to state-of-the-art safety equipment and workplace safety procedures addressing and managing operational safety hazards and impacts, with the goal of promoting both human safety and environmental protection;
- An Intervention and Containment Working Group that will make recommendations, hold workshops and focus on issues relating to developing, testing and implementing cutting-edge containment equipment and procedures for immediate deployment in case of a blowout;
- The Oil Spill Response Working Group will develop recommendations, hold workshops and focus on issues relating to improved skimming and shoreline protection equipment, as well as other advancements in oil spill cleanup and response technologies.

Technical experts from a variety of disciplines in the public and private sectors will serve on each working group. The purpose of the working groups will be to recommend various research and development projects to improve practices or equipment designs and testing protocols, or otherwise to advance the working group's area of focus. Each working group will also be responsible for periodically evaluating existing capacities, identifying areas in need of improvement, and recommending research and development projects to the Safety Committee.

Research projects may be recommended for the Safety Committee's consideration not only by the working groups, but also by members of industry, government, academia, NGOs or the general public. The Safety Committee will develop a method for collecting and tracking such proposals.

## II. Membership

Over the coming weeks, we will be selecting the membership of this new Safety Committee from candidates responding to the Committee Membership's *Federal Register* notice. The Secretary has announced his intent for Dr. Tom Hunter to serve as Chairman. Under Dr. Hunter's leadership, we will assemble a cadre of experts from federal agencies, industry, academia, national laboratories, and various research organizations. Safety Committee members will be appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, with input and recommendations from the above referenced groups and other stakeholders.

We expect that the Safety Committee will comprise 15 members in total, including:

- up to six members representing the federal government, including one member each from BOEMRE; the Department of Energy; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Environmental Protection Agency; United States Geological Survey and the United States Coast Guard;
- up to four members representing the offshore energy industry;
- up to four members representing the academic community and non-governmental organizations; and
- the Committee chairperson.