

Subject: Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 3, 2010

From: Deepwater Horizon Response External Affairs <donotreply@deepwaterhorizonresponse.com>

Date: Thu, 3 Jun 2010 13:55:20 -0700 (PDT)

To: info@californiaskywatch.com

DATE: June 03, 2010 15:47:58 CST

Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 3, 2010

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METAIRIE, La.

- Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen, National Incident Commander for the Deepwater BP oil spill response, briefed national and international media today on developments in the ongoing response. The briefing took place at 9:15 a.m. at Coast Guard Sector New Orleans.

Click [here](#) to listen to an audio file of the briefing.

The entire transcript follows.

U.S. COAST GUARD ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN: Good morning, folks.

For the first time in a couple of days, I have some good news. We have just cut the riser pipe off lower marine package and we got the word from Houston—they had to use the shear cutters, which are the ones they used to do the other riser pipe cut yesterday. As you know, the other saw that we were attempting to use was not successful in getting through the riser pipe in the internal drill pipe, so we replaced it with the shears, which don't have as clean a cut—but we do have a cut now. The next step will be to put the containment cap over what's left of the riser pipe on the lower marine riser package and start seeing if we move gas and oil up the pipe— hopefully, to start flaring off gas and start production later on today. We'll give you updates as we go on throughout the day, but a significant step forward at this point; the challenge now is to seat that containment cap over it.

And just to differentiate between what we were trying to do with the smooth cut and what's going to happen now, we were actually going to put a very, very solid seal with a cap that would have reduced the amount of oil that could potentially leak around the connection. This is an irregular cut—it will be a little bit more challenging to get the seal around, but we will have a containment device there and we'll be able to capture more oil than we would otherwise and we're going to have to see as we put the containment cap on exactly how effective it is. We will have the option to use undersea dispersant to deal with any oil that might not be captured. It will be a kind of a test and adapt phase as we move ahead—but a significant step forward this morning and pleased to report that.

Just a couple of updates of what I've been up to the last 24 hours and I'd be glad to answer some questions. I spent a good deal of time yesterday with Lisa Jackson, the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] administrator. She has been down in the area. We've been going in different directions to make sure we can cover as much area as possible. She's a tremendous asset, as she is from the local area. She has existing relationships in many of the parishes and we've been working very closely together. She's been very, very closely following the dispersant issue. I can tell you that the EPA has been doing a number of water testings. They're also doing air quality testing associated with it. So far, they have found no impacts on the wildlife related to the toxicity of the dispersants, but they continue to do that and we will continue to work very, very closely with EPA on this. ;

We are also committed to using as little dispersant as we have to on the surface and concentrating our dispersant use subsea where it is most effective—thereby reducing the fact of any potential impacts on the surface. And we know we have used a lot of dispersants

out there. We're approaching the million gallon mark. You know we understand (inaudible) milestone. There are concerns about that. We will continue to work the dispersant issue very, very closely as we move forward.

We also announced yesterday that we had approved the proposal from the State of Louisiana to add the five more segments on their proposal to the Corps of Engineers that were approved by the Corps of Engineers as a legitimate means to deal with the oil spill to keep oil from getting into the marshlands of Louisiana. I've had several conversations with Governor [Bobby] Jindal about this and I'll be meeting with him later on today. I will continue to work with the State of Louisiana moving forward on this project.

Regarding the current trajectory, as you know, the upper edge of the perimeter of the spills—and I would call them spills—as you know, before I have said this is a collection of spills not a monolithic spill. It is approaching the southern areas of Mississippi, Alabama and Florida with some oil being found in Mississippi and tar balls reported on Dauphin Island and some sheening.

We have moved a large number of Coast Guard assets into the area including a Coast Guard (inaudible) endurance cutter that has helicopter capability to do surveillance and also do command and control. We have positioned two 225-foot Coast Guard buoy tenders that have organic spill skimming capability in the equipment on board the boats and we have a number of patrol boats out there that are looking to support the opportunity vessels that we've enrolled there to help us deploy boom, scout for oil patches offshore, and conduct skimming operations. And we'll continue to focus on the Mississippi-Alabama area as long as the winds are out of the south. We continue to move boom into Alabama. We continue to look at strategies to deal with the entrance to Mobile Bay, (inaudible) Pass and what they call Katrina Cut on Dauphin Island.

And with that, I'd be glad to take your questions, folks. You always go first; I'm going to go with him.

Q: Admiral, Peter King with CBS News Radio, and talking about top cap, obviously, you've tried capping before, it hasn't worked. How hard is it to put a containment cap over this pipe considering all of the oil coming out, the currents a mile down and that kind of thing? Could you elaborate on that for us?

ADM. ALLEN: Sure. Prior to the cut, they actually had suspended the containment cap at the end of a riser pipe that's suspended from the production vessel right over the area, so it's not like they even have to move it in. It's a matter of moving down and seating it. And what you've got is almost an inverted funnel that is wider than the pipe it's going to cover and in between there is a rubber seal around it. I don't want to make this too simple of analogy, but not unlike the rubber seal you find inside a garden hose and then be able to put that over and get that seal to fit as good as it can, understanding that it's an irregular cut and they'll be doing that for the next couple of hours.

Yes, ma'am.

Q: Good morning, Admiral. (Inaudible) what's the latest on the underwater (inaudible) and how does (inaudible) deployed (inaudible) what's going on underwater (inaudible) oil and gas is concerned? And then secondarily, how many skimmers are on the (inaudible)?

ADM. ALLEN: We'll get back to you. For the record, we have skimmers all over, so there's some in Alabama, some in Mississippi, some off Louisiana, but Tony Russell will give you the exact number when we're done here today. Go back to your first question, I'm sorry.

Q: Yes. The plumes of oil underwater.

ADM. ALLEN: Yes. OK. Thank you. We had some extensive discussion in our briefing yesterday with Jane Lubchenco, the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] administrator who was down here—in fact, she is meeting with some of the research vessels while she's down here and talking to them. We've had some anecdotal reports from research vessels from universities that have found dense plumes or what they believe to be plumes under the water. We're in the process of taking samples and trying to figure out what they are. They're denser than the water, but we're not sure whether it's oil or not.

There's some—there's been some conjecture on whether or not the use of subsea dispersants might be having that oil gather below the surface and go someplace else. We have sensors down that are actually checking the oil as it goes up through the water column after dispersants had been applied.

The dispersants generally make the oil separate and they wouldn't gather together in a kind of a plume undersea. I don't know if we know [that] there is causality between the dispersants and the plumes that are being reported. There are (inaudible) ships out there to collect samples in various areas at different water depths to try and understand what the concentration of oil is at what depth. That's all going to be brought back together in terms like a data map, and they're going to put together a model of what we think is going on out there and that's in progress right now, we just have not finished the work yet.

Q: Admiral, David Mattingly, from CNN. BP is running ads now promising that they will make this right. Given the fact that just about everything they've done has either fallen short or failed, how much confidence do you have that BP will make this right?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, it's their assertion and their duty to stand by it. And I haven't seen the advertisements yet, but I'm not sure—I think we need to separate a couple of things out here. The stuff that's been happening on the subsea floor—our applications of technology to either cap this well or control or contain the flow as we understand right now using technologies that normally work in oil spill response or a well containment, but had never been tried at 5,000 feet. So the real issue is trying to do things where there is human access at 5,000 feet that are legitimate ways to deal with these problems that have never been done down there before. And a lot of times, there's going to be tests, check—adaptation and check, and evolution, and that's pretty much what's been happening here.

They do have a duty; they're the responsible party. We're accountable for overseeing them and we're doing that very aggressively.

Q: Yes, Admiral, (inaudible) with ABC News. Can you give us a status report on the relief well? I know that there was pause in the second drilling of the second relief well. Are all the resources now refocused on drilling those two relief wells?

ADM. ALLEN: They are and they're both on target for their dates right now. BP produces what's called a "depth-to-time" chart and based on what they know they're going to be drilling through—and sometimes it anticipates that it will be harder to drill through rock than it is other sediments and so forth and we actually get a daily update on that. They are slightly ahead of schedule right now, but I'm not—we're not willing to declare victory until that—the relief wells are actually connected. We stopped—its mid August for the first well.

Regarding the deep driller two that was taken off-station—when the deep driller two was being deployed and we thought there was an opportunity to cap the well, we knew one of the options would be to put another blowout preventer over the current one that's down there. So they actually deployed a blowout preventer on the deep driller two. They went out and they started the second relief well. When they started the top till option, they thought they might be able to stabilize the pressure in the well with mud and then put a cement plug in and be able to do something else. They were prepared to put another blowout preventer on top of it. The deep driller two stopped drilling operations for that time, moved over and was ready to deploy the blowout preventer should that be needed. It was not. They went back, resumed drilling and they're still on schedule to complete their portion of the drilling.

Yes.

Q: Yes. Greg Bruston with the Associate Press. Why did —why did the diamond saw fail and some of the mud and debris from previous attempts to plug the well erode (inaudible)?

ADM. ALLEN: I don't know if we know exactly why the diamond saw failed. The conjecture is that it encountered the drill pipe inside the riser pipe. Anybody that's ever tried to saw the limb of a tree or anything else—if you're not holding on to it and you have pressure back against you, you're just pushing it away and it's kind of wobbling around and I think the conjecture was the pipe was not stationary enough to put pressure against it for the saw to be effective and they tried it for several hours and at some point they just said, "Well, that's not going to be successful in doing that" and then went to the second option.

Yes, ma'am.

Q: (Inaudible) efforts that with looser fitting (inaudible) there was concern about the seawater getting into those containment options and creating (inaudible)...

ADM. ALLEN: Right.

Q: ... is that a concern as well with the looser fitting caps that you have to put on because of the jagged cut?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I call it a looser fitting, but it's still fairly tight—but, there is a problem with oil interacting with sea water and as you know, at that temperature and that pressure, the natural gas that's in part of the hydrocarbons that coming up interacts with the sea water and forms what they call hydrates that cause the first containment device to actually get buoyant and start to float away. As they built these new containment caps that are out there now and they have several of them stored on the sea floor based on the type of cuts they're going to try and seal, they've actually put ports into the top of them where they can put methanol in to deal with the hydrate problem while the hydrocarbons are coming up. So I would anticipate once that cap is in place later on today, they will also be putting in hoses to inject methanol to try and deal with the hydrate problem. Yes, sir.

Q: Admiral, David Shukman, BBC News. As I understand it, for the last couple of days, the clean up operations working out of Venice have had to be stalled because of the threat of lightning strikes. What does that tell you about the risk as we enter the hurricane season?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, we have to stop when we have not only lightning, but when there's weather out that doesn't allow us to operate in small boat safely. We've done a lot of—we've expended a lot of effort to push resources down into Venice, including even these marsh camps that are floating hotels, if you will—that are closer to the marshy area. But we are always going to have to deal with weather. Weather is a huge factor on scene in our ability to do in situ burning or mechanical skimming and there are days where we basically cannot do anything out there because the sea state just won't allow it and I think we need to understand as we

move into hurricane season or we are in hurricane season, that until the relief well is done and the well is capped, we're still going to be at some risk exposure to weather even if it's not a hurricane. Heavier weather could force us to stop doing certain operations.

Because of that, we are working with British Petroleum right now on a series of alternatives that might make the operation more survivable in heavier weather—including bringing in larger platforms for the production of the oil that's brought up from the containment devices that could stay on station longer in heavier weather.

But at some point, we need to face the possibility that [in] a certain storm condition we would have to stop the containment recovery operation and get those resources off there for safety purposes. At that point, we're going to have oil being discharged. They are looking at systems whereby they could deploy undersea dispersants to mitigate that while the vessels are not on station, but it's going to be an issue we're going to have manage day-to-day and there's no guarantee moving forward.

Yes, sir.

Q: Admiral, Alan Johnson from (inaudible) Press. British Petroleum said last week that they're reviewing 11 alternatives to Corexit. Has that review been completed? And they keep saying that EPA has sanctioned the use of Corexit, but what the results of the discussions between the governments and the BP of the alternative? And will the government allow Corexit to be used on inland waterways like Lake Pontchartrain?

ADM. ALLEN: The Corexit is allowed by use under the schedule approved by EPA for dispersants. We have had British Petroleum provide information to EPA on alternatives to it, but we've also asked them to look at sources, supply and logistics that if we were to move to another dispersant, if there was enough out there to be able to be used for what we need to do out there. This is not a closed issue. It remains under discussion. It's a very tough issue because this material is available to us now and it is effective. The thing we're most concerned about now is two things—number one is the total amount of dispersants that have been deployed out there to date and the impact of subsea dispersants at that depth in the water column which we don't have a lot of information about moving forward.

Right now, a legitimate alternative has not surfaced yet and EPA continues to review it and I continue to talk with Lisa Jackson about it, but that's where we're at right now.

Yes. Anybody else?

Q: Operator, we're ...

ADM. ALLEN: Let me take one more and then we ...

Q: Just one more question, there was concern that once that pipe was sheared off that there would be an increase in flow of oil. Are you seeing that? And do you know if it's near the 20 percent figure we've been hearing?

ADM. ALLEN: We'll probably have to put some information out later today because as I was walking in, I got the word that the pipe was cut. As you know, we have video down there and we'll try and get some information on that and give it to you. The estimate from our flow rate technology group—led by [U.S. Geological Survey Director] Marsha McNutt—was they would estimate that if the kink and it was actually suppressing some of the pressure going out and it was able flow, if that were the case, that it could be up to 20 percent more. We don't know that it is the case; we'll have to get some empirical evidence now that we have the pipe cut off.

I would say this as one final comment before we go to the calls here, at our request, British Petroleum has done a couple of things which I think demonstrate some good faith on their part. Number one is the number of video feeds that are being made available and they are offering two technical briefs a day on the actual operations that are going on—not only on the subsea area there, but the clean up operations, as well. And with that, we go to the calls on the phone.

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: Operator, we're ready for questions from the phone. Operator?

ADM. ALLEN: We're ready for questions.

OPERATOR: Okay. Today your first question comes from the line of Kristin Hays.

Q: Yes, gentlemen. This is Kristen Hays with Reuters. I've got two questions. First of all, on the terminology, Admiral Allen—call this a top hat, but is it the same—it's not the same top hat that BP was going to use in May that was kind of a smaller version of that big copper dam. This is actually the smaller containment cap that has a seal on it and second of all, with this ongoing operation today and with the lowering of the cap on the LMRP and the jagged part of the pipe, will you give us an update later today when and if that actually happens and takes place?

ADM. ALLEN: We will. We will absolutely do that. It is a little confusing because the very first containment system they

developed which was unsuccessful was followed by the development of about five others that vary in their capacity related to how wide they are, what kind of seals they have on them and what kind of manifolds are set up to where they can actually apply things like dispersants or actually connect to the killing the choke lines that are on the lower marine riser package.

The current one they're looking at is the one if you took one step back from having the best cap we could get, that is what they're looking at in this containment cap. It has a rubber seal. It allows it to go over an irregular pipe. It also can accommodate the fact that that riser pipe is not exactly vertical right now, it's about 10 degrees angled over and it's—the rubber seal allows it to be able to fit on that even though it's not going to be exactly a perpendicular fit.

And they have a couple of others that are stored on the sea floor down there, so they have other options, but given the type of cut they have right now, this is the best containment cap to be used and it is not like the one that was used earlier.

Q: OK. All right. Thank you.

ADM. ALLEN: Yes.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Susan Baker.

Q: Hi, Admiral. This is Susan Baker with Dow Jones. Since the diamond shear cut didn't work, will this essentially make the spill worse in the short term?

ADM. ALLEN: It will not make the spill worse. There are two issues related to oil coming out while we're doing this. Number one, no matter what type of cut we would have made, there was a potential, at least in the minds of our technical flow rate team, that we could increase the number of hydrocarbons coming out or oil coming out by about 20 percent and that was an estimate based on the fact that if the kink was actually holding back some of the oil, it could be release.

Q: Okay.

ADM. ALLEN: So that's one issue. The other issue is once any containment cap is on, since it's not a perfect seal, there is a chance some oil could escape. In a perfect world, we would want an absolute seal where you put two pipes together with flanges and you bolt it so there's absolutely no way where anything could escape. And you do know with these rubber seals in an irregular fit, there's a chance that the pressure of the oil going up through the pipe will be more than what the pipe can tolerate at a particular time, it would spill over and maybe get out through the seals. We intend to treat that with subsea dispersants and the amount of oil that might get through that seal is something we're just going to have to determine as they put this thing down over the riser pipe and get the best fit they can.

Q: Okay.

ADM. ALLEN: Next question.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Karen Zidevogel. Karen, your line is open.

Q: Sorry. I think that might be, but it was nothing like my name. It's Karen Zidevogel from AFP. I have a question. You just mentioned subsea dispersants and I've been reading on the EPA website that they haven't been tested and we have no idea what sort of effect they're going to have on the environment. And the other thing is—dispersants, I believe cause the oil to sink and yet we're denying that there are plumes, or BP is denying that there are plumes underwater and I wondered if somebody could address those two points.

ADM. ALLEN: Yes. Let me clarify, first of all, when we talk about subsea dispersants, we're talking about the same dispersants that are used on the surface being used at 5,000 feet for the first time and we don't know what the effects are of applying dispersants on the oil that's been rising up from the pipe and then what it does in the water column and the effect of the dispersants at that depth. It's the same dispersants that we've been using on the surface.

Secondly, dispersants don't cause the oil to sink. Dispersants cause the oil to break into smaller pieces. It allows them to biodegrade more quickly. And that is the purpose of dispersants.

What we don't understand is that as the oil rises because it's lighter than water, after dispersants have been applied, what is the fate of the oil as it approaches the surface? And that's what the current water testing that NOAA is doing is going to be able to tell us. Thank you. Next question.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Natalie Binomasy.

Q: Hello. Admiral Allen, I'd like to know if you have any comments in the situation as far as the special CNN had last night with the chemist, Ms. Subra, as far as her thoughts on the severity of this dispersant that we're using?

ADM. ALLEN: I'm not familiar with the special in question, but I'd be glad to have my press assistant get the information and we'll get back to you with an answer. I'm just—I wasn't familiar with the report, ma'am.

Q: Okay.

ADM. ALLEN: We will get back to you. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Brad Johnson.

Q: Hi, thank you for taking this question. My question is you know you said that a while ago that you trust Tony Hayward and I know that you've kind of rephrased that in talking about your responsibility to oversee this.

But what's—I mean why should the—the president had said that BP is—it's in BP's interest to misinform the public and the government about things that could affect its financial bottom line. What specific steps have you taken to prevent BP from misinforming you, the incident commander?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, you know this word “trust” comes up a lot so why don't we have like a frank, an honest discussion about this. There are a lot of ways to define trust. When I have a discussion with anybody, including Tony Hayward, and I create an expectation as the national incident commander, my expectation is they will do what I ask.

They comply with my requests and they continue to do that and they—and they are responsive. I don't know how you'd characterize that—if it's trust, if it's partnership. Whatever it is, there is a need to cooperatively proceed forward and address these problems for the American people.

Requests we have made to British Petroleum for live video feeds, for technical briefings, for a hydrocarbon management plan, the dispersant plans associated with top kill—every time I've asked for those they've been given to me.

There are issues from time to time with logistical coordination on cleanup operations, ordering a boom and how fast that gets there. They tend to be more issues of how we coordinate and how we actually work together out there in creating unity of effort.

I don't know how to state it any more clearly than the fact that when I deal frankly and openly with Mr. Hayward and I make a request, I get an answer. When I ask for action, it is taken. Next question.

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: Operator, last question.

ADM. ALLEN: Last question.

OPERATOR: Your last question comes from the line of Jessica Resnick-Ault

Q: Hello, Admiral Allen. This is Jessica Resnick-Ault with Bloomberg News. I had a few questions, but I guess the most pressing thing goes back to this issue of the oil that could push out from the rubber seals as you described it earlier.

I'm curious as to how much oil you see leaking out. I understand it's obviously very preliminary but what are—what are the scientists seeing? I mean, at this point we knew, for example, that cutting into the riser pipe could cause a 20 percent increase in flow. What kind of a percentage increase do they see from this? How—or what kind of percentage do they see not being trapped in this cap?

ADM. ALLEN: What's happening, the containment cap is going to capture the oil being brought up through the wellbore by the pressure in the reservoir that's down below.

Q: Right.

ADM. ALLEN: We know the pressure in the reservoir is somewhere around 9,000 psi, and the pressure readings taken just before the top kill operation began last week indicated that the pressure at the blowout preventer was around 3,500 psi.

In other words, that's the pressure of the oil coming up through the wellbore. It is counter-balanced by the hydrostatic pressure of the water at 5,000 feet. There was pressure for the oil to come up into the pipe and rise up to be produced at the vessel on the top and the—and the natural gas flared off.

The question is, will the pressure of the oil going up into a much smaller pipe, and the drill—and the pipes you're looking at are smaller than the wellbore themselves, if they completely fill up and more pressure is created there, will enough pressure be created where it'll force the oil around the sides and back down and out the oil seals?

And the answer is, I don't think we know until we know how the containment cap is seated on there and how well the rubber seals have done their job. And we actually have some video that takes a look and tells us how much oil, if any, is coming out around it.

We could be lucky. There could be close to none. There could be some. I don't think we know until we actually see how the seal fits with the more jagged cut out there than what we anticipated with the fine cut. We'll have to wait and see and we're going to have the video. We'll be talking very frankly and openly about it when we know. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

ADM. ALLEN: (Inaudible), everybody. Thank you.

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: That's it.

ADM. ALLEN: Back to the office.

OPERATOR: This concludes today's conference. You may now disconnect.

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