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BP Chief Draws Outrage for Attending Yacht Race



Chris Ison/Press Association, via Associated Press

Tony Hayward's yacht, left, sailed in the J. P. Morgan Asset Management Round the Island Race on Saturday.

By [LIZ ROBBINS](#)

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[BP](#) officials on Saturday scrambled yet again to respond to another public relations challenge when their embattled chief executive, [Tony Hayward](#), spent the day off the coast of England watching his yacht compete in one of the world's largest races.

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Two days after Mr. Hayward angered lawmakers on Capitol Hill with his refusal to provide details during testimony about the worst offshore [oil spill](#) in United States history, and one day after BP's chairman said the chief executive would not be as involved in daily operations in the Gulf of Mexico, Mr. Hayward sparked new controversy from afar.


"He is having some rare private time with his son," a BP spokeswoman, Sheila Williams, said in a telephone interview on Saturday.

But [Rahm Emanuel](#), the White House chief of staff, who taped an interview for ABC's "This Week," called Mr. Hayward's attendance at the race "part of a long line of P.R. gaffes and mistakes" that he has made.

"To quote Tony Hayward, he's got his life back," Mr. Emanuel said.

On May 31, six weeks after the spill began, Mr. Hayward uttered "I'd like my life back," a

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comment that struck many in the gulf region as insensitive, and for which he eventually apologized.

On Saturday, Senator [Richard Shelby](#), Republican of Alabama, called Mr. Hayward's yacht outing the "height of arrogance," in an interview with Fox News.

"I can tell you that yacht ought to be here skimming and cleaning up a lot of the oil," Mr. Shelby said. "He ought to be down here seeing what is really going on. Not in a cocoon somewhere."

But Mr. Hayward's role in the gulf became the topic of further speculation on Saturday, even as Ms. Williams, the BP spokeswoman, insisted that Mr. Hayward was still in charge of the company and the enormous cleanup operations.

"Tony receives regular updates from the gulf," she said in an e-mail message.

On Friday, the chairman of the board of BP, [Carl-Henric Svanberg](#), told the British TV network Sky News that Mr. Hayward would be "now handing over" the daily operations in the gulf to Robert Dudley, an American who joined BP as part of its acquisition of Amoco a decade ago.

On Saturday, BP tried to clarify what Mr. Svanberg had said about the transition of leadership in the gulf. "What he meant by 'now,' " Ms. Williams said, was that "there would be a transition over to Bob over a period of time."

"Obviously, Tony's main priority remains overseeing all BP operations," she said. "Over all, there will be some responsibilities handed over, but Tony will remain in full control until we have stopped the leak."

When that might happen is not clear. Crude oil is flowing at a rate estimated between 35,000 and 60,000 barrels of oil a day from the damaged well, and BP has been able to capture only a percentage of that with its current containment methods.

BP said it was aiming to stop the leak in August, when two relief wells it is drilling will intersect with the damaged one. The company said on Friday that it was ahead of schedule on one of the wells and within 200 feet of the side of the damaged well, but that the drilling would proceed more slowly the closer it got.

Workers had captured 24,500 barrels of oil on Friday before shutting down the operation because of a malfunction on the vessel that is siphoning the oil from the leaking well — 1,000 fewer barrels than on Thursday. Operations restarted early Saturday.

By then, Mr. Hayward was already in Cowes on the southern coast of England for the [J. P. Morgan](#) Asset Management Round the Island Race, a yacht race around the Isle of Wight. A spokeswoman for the race said in an e-mail message "that a gentleman by the name of Tony Hayward is a co-owner of an entered boat called 'Bob' that was racing today, however his name did not appear on any crew list."

The boat [finished fourth](#) in a class of 45 others.

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