

Subject: Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 1, 2010

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Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 1, 2010

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NEW ORLEANS, La.

- Adm. Thad Allen, national incident commander for Deepwater BP oil spill response, provided an update on ongoing Deepwater BP oil spill response efforts in the Port of New Orleans Administration Building today at 1 p.m. CDT.

The audio file will be posted here when available.

The entire transcript is as follows:

OPERATOR: Good afternoon. My name is (Terry), and I will be your conference operator.

At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the BP oil spill response. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise.

After the speakers' remarks, there will be a question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star, then the number one, on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press the pound key. Thank you.

Mr. Allen, you may begin.

U.S. COAST GUARD LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ANTHONY RUSSELL:

This is actually Lieutenant Commander Tony Russell. I appreciate everybody's flexibility today—just want to go over quick ground rules of the press briefing today.

We have press here in the room, but we also have press on the phone. Adm. Allen's going to start with a brief operational overview—about five to 10 minutes long—and then we're going to open it to 10 minutes of questions from the room and then 10 minutes questions from the phone.

We ask you to please stick to one question to give everybody an opportunity. When you ask your question, please give your name and affiliation.

And with that, I turn it over Admiral Allen, national incident commander.

U.S. COAST GUARD ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN:

Thanks, Tony.

Good afternoon, folks. Great to be here in New Orleans. I'd like to start out by talking a little bit about how we're going to be communicating in the future days, got a couple operational issues for you, and we'll talk about some current work that we're conducting, and then I'll be glad to take questions at that point.

We made a leadership transition inside the Unified Area Command up in Robert, Louisiana. Rear Admiral Mary Landry, who has been coordinating the response so far, has been returned to her duties as the Eighth District Commander here in New Orleans. Now, this coincides with the start of hurricane season and the need for her to be focused on the larger array of press that are present here in the Gulf and the Midwest—which she is responsible for.

I want to thank her personally, as the national incident commander, for the outstanding job she did leading what has been a pretty remarkable and phenomenal and unprecedented response, knowing the Coast Guard, first of all, are involved, but that the interagency folks are involved, and the state and local officials as well.

I know Admiral [Robert] Papp. Who relieved me last week as the commandant of the Coast Guard, will want her services there, as he looks forward what might be a challenging hurricane season – (inaudible).

Mary Landry will be replaced by Admiral Jim Watson, who has been working helping her, assisting her, and—(inaudible)—coordinator looking forward. So, the goal is to have me speak to you on a daily basis, depending on where I'm at.

Many times I will be down there in the region – in fact, most of the time, we'll be there in the region. And as the work is done, obviously, we'll make access there for you.

The goal is to create a broad picture of this response—what's going on— and to be very frank with the American public, to be able to answer their questions, particularly in my role as national incident commander. If anybody has any questions about that, we can see later [during the] Q&A.

A couple of things I'd like to talk about today. The reason we're here in New Orleans—and we're actually in a port authority building down on the waterfront – later on this afternoon, we're going to continue to have meetings of state and local representatives and federal partners and representatives of academia.

And we're going to talk about the proposal that's been made by the State of Louisiana to construct barrier islands or berms as potential protective measure against the oil, both to the west of the Mississippi River and to the east, up towards the Chandeleur Islands, Plaquemines Parish, Saint Bernard Parish, and so forth.

This was a topic of intense discussion with the president last week in Grand Isle. He directed me to convene a meeting to obtain transparency on information associated with this and understand the pros and cons. Is this an effective way to respond to an oil spill? What are the issues associated with it? Are there potential environmental impacts? What should we be concerned about, or are critical elements of information that we need to move forward?

So that will happen this afternoon. We'll have that meeting. And when it's done, I'll come away with the information that's derived from the meeting and will report that back to the president there with my recommendations.

As we speak, we are in the first process of moving to the ability to control the oil leakage. As you know, during this last weekend, we tried a top kill exercise. There were three different top kill attempts made on three consecutive days—30,000 barrels of mud placed down the well bore—unsuccessful at overcoming the pressure of the hydrocarbons coming up through the well bore.

As a result of that, we thought of oil containment, rather than capping the well. That involves a couple of things this afternoon. One of them is cutting the riser pipes beyond the—(inaudible)—you've all seen on television—and then doing a second cut, called a diamond-wire cut. We will attempt to get that as close to the top of the marine riser package as we can to make that as fine a cut, and hopefully get it as perpendicular in the center axis of the pipe as we can.

The reason we want to do that is we have two options. One is called a top cap. It is a much tighter, finer seal with a large rubber gasket that goes over the top to ensure a minimum amount of oil leaks out. And if we don't get that, then we'll put another device over the—(inaudible)—central oil leakage around the side. But we want that first option, if we can do it. That will depend on the results and the success of that second cut, the diamond-wire cut

As I said, we're in the middle of the first cut right now, which is called the sheer cut, and we'll be reporting from our various locations this afternoon as we (inaudible) that process.

So after that, (inaudible) will begin to take the oil that is coming off the well bore—take it to the surface and actually produce it.

That would be to flare off the natural gas, blend reduce the oil and transfer it to shore by tanker or barge. As we move to containment, rather than capping the well, it introduce some risk factors that we need to be aware of.

Once we cut the marine riser pipe this afternoon, the the flow rate technical group that works for me as the national incident commander, led by Marcia McNutt of the U.S. Geological Survey, estimate we could see—during that period before the cap goes on—a 20 percent increase in oil flow.

And we've discussed, with British Petroleum, mitigating measures, regarding undersea dispersant use and so forth, as we move forward, to try and mitigate the impact. The fact of the matter is, there will be a period of time where there will be hydrocarbons coming out of the well while we cut the pipe, remove it, and put the cap, or the top cap, in place.

That brings up a second risk point as we move into hurricane season. We're going to be producing oil out of this well at a low rate, because that's the way we're going to relieve the pressure that's currently there. That means we're going to have to have a way to consider heavy weather, hurricane weather, and what to do about that.

There are a couple options that are underway right now, that would include a floating production facility that needed to be separated and moved off to stations, should we get violent weather here during the hurricane season. Those plans are being finalized right now, and over the course of the next couple days, I'll be glad to give you some more information on that.

But our concern right now is that we don't have the well capped; therefore, there is a possibility, during hurricane season, if we would have to go off station, that it would cause more oil to be discharged. And we need to understand what are the conditions, how long can we stay out there, how quickly do we redeploy it back, and do we have a way to do things like treat the oil that will be coming out with subsea dispersants? Both plans have been requested and they're being developed by – (inaudible).

And do we have ways to (inaudible) (treat) the oil (that will) be coming out (subsequent) (inaudible). Most plans have been requested to be developed by (inaudible) forward.

Finally, the weather has moved to the south, as I've stated many, many times, this is not a huge, monolithic oil slick. This is a bunch of smaller oil slicks, some very large, here – 15 miles in length and a couple miles in width – and scattered over a 200-mile radius. So it's a very, very large perimeter. And the reason we have this aggregation of smaller spills is that as the oil comes to the surface, there have been different conditions regarding current, wind and tide, and it's moved in different directions.

So there's some oil to south and west of the Mississippi River, but with the southerly winds coming right now, that's starting to move up toward Mississippi Sound and Alabama. We've got some reports of contact in Mississippi and as far as Dauphin Island. We've dispatched survey teams to see what the impact is out there and to the extent that it requires resources—(inaudible)

So that's an update for today and I'd be glad to go into any questions you may have.

Yes, sir.?

Q: David Donnelly, CNN. The White House's threat of frustration with what they call inaccurate and not transparent information coming from BP. And I'm curious, there was a representative from the Coast Guard and a representative from the (inaudible) standing in at every single press conference.

If they were given that information, why didn't someone from the government call them—(inaudible)? It makes it look like they didn't know (inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I'm not sure what information you're talking about. No one that I'm aware of has – (inaudible).

CNN: Could you explain why BP did (inaudible)...why not – why are there not going to be more press conferences?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, first, there are a couple things in play. Number one, our people in Robert, Louisiana will be handling the press briefings that have been going on. (Inaudible) – with BP. That doesn't mean with BP but – (inaudible) – with him. And we need to understand what to do – (inaudible).

Q: (Inaudible), radio. (I have yet to see or hear) what the timeline or (inaudible) based on the operations (inaudible). So can you help us out – (inaudible) – timeframe of what they expect in the next day, next couple – (inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN What's going to happen is, as soon as the sheer cut is made, that will remove the weight of most of the riser pipe and send it across the ocean floor. They are – (inaudible) – wire saw to refine a horizontal cut. . Once that's done and the pipe is removed then they will take a look and evaluate how soon – (inaudible) – one of two options: You call it top cap or top hat.

Top hat involves much freer integrity of steel including a rubber band around that – (inaudible) – less oil be released. If we can't do that then top hat will be applied. We use two different devices starting at this point. (Inaudible) – sea beds and what you call –

(inaudible) – storage. And there will be a period of time where – (inaudible). Once those caps are on, whichever one is determined, then we'll – (inaudible) – to hook that to the Enterprise to set up a riser pipe and start reduction – (inaudible).

There is a fine line between when that cut is made and the cap is in place. It could be anywhere from 24 to 36 hours – maybe up to 72 hours – (inaudible) – reduction. As we get further into it, As we get further into it, we know whether or not we can (recycle) those numbers for you. I would take that as a (inaudible).

Yes, ma'am.

Q: And so what are – (inaudible)? (Inaudible) – farther than what we – (inaudible). Do you think that that would be – (inaudible) – how much of the barrier islands – (inaudible) – if this plan is stopped?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I think you need to talk about how much is oil right now. But I think if you look at the extremity – (inaudible) – of impact – (inaudible) – over by Port Fourchon, places in the west, sort of up behind the Chandeleur islands. That's pretty much the area. That brackets the area within which the state has been exposed to – (inaudible). So if you talk about how much oil – (inaudible) – going to be, I think, pretty much attractive to the area – (inaudible).

Q: Is that going to affect – (inaudible)?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, we've already authorized one of the segments to be – (inaudible) – prototype. So it's a discussion they – (inaudible) – where, what about the remaining segments? Is there a reason to do that? And that's what the discussion will be about today.

Q: (inaudible)

ADM. ALLEN: (Inaudible) (rock). (I'm trying to make it) – this is a very, very complicated proposal, (something) that (inaudible) for an oil spill (spot). And a lot of pros and consumer associated with (inaudible). (Inaudible) physical area (that's) going to have some positive effect on the (inaudible) oil (inaudible) to marshland. (Inaudible) area. (There will) be construction going on during hurricane season and construction site (inaudible) oil (that point on).

Those of the kind of discussions we're going to have this afternoon, what we really need to (buy) this, what are the (effective) (inaudible), and what are the pros and consumer.

Yes, sir.

Q: (Inaudible) – (inaudible) (expect that 2,000 acres to fill in), but it's more like 30 acres, do you have any updates on that and how (inaudible)?

ADM. ALLEN: We're beginning conversation of what I would call linear versus top (inaudible). And I think probably the best thing for us to do is – (inaudible) – folks a couple of days to – sit down and come up with a (inaudible) (metric). (Inaudible) – miles of shoreline doesn't necessarily equate the impact you're looking at with the half-mile in the marsh. And I understand the difference there and we will reconcile – (inaudible).

Yes.

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Right.

Q: (And now) (inaudible) (first thing) (inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Sure.

Q: (First the) (inaudible)?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, first of all, I had discussions this week with Deputy Secretary Harris, the Deputy Secretary of Labor. He and I agreed that we need to be (inaudible) integrated. We've got to keep (inaudible) (work) from labor and OSHA, (inaudible) for the (inaudible).

What I thought we needed to do is we're kind of creating stock- that if you go (inaudible) negotiate an MOU with the Department of Labor that's being worked by our staff today probably would be (inaudible) 24 hours we'll (inaudible) (engine of the) (inaudible). They are present there already. There will be a formal way to (inaudible) protocols, how to do deal with (workplace safety) violations, how to keep gathering facts and information.

When we pulled the fishermen off the water last week (inaudible) We have to put all of those people together. But I thought we

needed a more formal, more integrated way to - (inaudible) we have an ongoing association. And wherever we get an indication from that point on - (inaudible).

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Well, there are a couple of issues here. Are you talking about Occupational Health and Safety or are you talking about the - (inaudible) - of the person?

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Well, the issue of the dispersant has been raised. I'm not sure we really understand if there is a connection between the air delivery of dispersant and folks being impacted by that on land. To that end EPA has been doing air sampling all around the coastline, water sampling.

I'm not sure we've got a causal link. We - (inaudible) - the aerial dispersant - (inaudible). You don't want to move anything out until - (inaudible). You always want to keep building confidence to move forward.

The EPA will continue to monitor and we need to understand exactly what the implications are for the dispersant. However, the protocol for applying dispersant - certain conditions have to be met - (inaudible).

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: No, it's not the same one. That's a different containment device. The two devices are much smaller and they're made to fit right over the top of (inaudible). One is just capable, (dependent) on how (inaudible) (attach) and put a (rubber) (inaudible). I don't want to trivialize it, but the difference between having a garden hose rubber gasket - (inaudible).

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: The cap is the one that has a tight seal. (Inaudible.)

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Is it not in now. In fact, In fact, you can think of the riser insertion tube as being (inaudible) and surface (inaudible) if you clicked on the lower break package, that is what both of these devices are intended to do. But right now, it is not. There's an issue of what we call simultaneous operations while ROVs (inaudible) certain amount of (inaudible) of (ROV) and (that could be) (inaudible) not it right now.

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: Sure. I think the first thing to understand is, we're not talking about capping the well anymore; we're talking about containing the well. The difference between capping the well and absorbing the pressure and being able to hold that until the relief well is completed, we're at, now, where we're containing the well, which means that we're taking the hydrocarbons that are coming up and actually bringing them to the surface and actually producing oil and flaring off natural gas. Since we're in a containment operation, we don't want to restrict the flow of pressures on that well bore, because I don't think we know the conditions of it, given the results of the top kill data that we got back.

What we want to do is be able to get that oil up and produced. So if you've got production going on, that necessarily involves - because that's along the surface - that's going to necessarily involve interaction with the weather.

And we're going into hurricane season. Therefore, you need to have a plan for how you would suspend operations, if you had to, because of the weather. But also, once we get this thing stabilized, to bring in a larger platform for production that can withstand heavier weather, so we have as good a package out there as we can, knowing that nothing is failsafe with hurricane season coming. There may be a time when they have to disconnect, and that brings up the fact that there will be oil flowing up there until we can be deployed back.

And again, the ultimate solution to this whole thing will be sometime in August, we hope.

Q: (Inaudible).

ADM. ALLEN: I think there's a pretty good level of confidence that one of them will go on and will be able to contain some oil, probably to a larger extent than we could with the riser insertion tubes, but again, we've basically said all the way along that we needed to break new ground here, and I think we have to (inaudible).

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: We - Admiral, let me just shift to the calls from the phone conference. Operator, we're open for calls from the phone line

ADM. ALLEN: Okay.

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: ... From the phone conference.

Operator? We're open for calls from the phone line.

OPERATOR: You have a question from the line of Anthony Guegel

Q: Yes, Anthony Guegel with "Upstream." Admiral, President Obama said the federal government had insisted that a second relief well be drilled. And I understand that operation has been suspended in order to ready the rig's BOP stack for that possible option of stabbing over the existing BOP.

But couldn't another BOP stack be secured from another rig, especially now that deepwater drilling has been suspended for six months?

ADM. ALLEN: That's a good question. Let me explain, because in fact, they are back drilling again. When the second (inaudible) is deployed in the second relief well, it was an opportunity to bring bring a blowout preventer down to site in case that should be the way we wanted to cap the well.

And after we went out and inspected the (inaudible) itself on the rig, one of the reasons it takes an oil rig to move one of these things is the (marine rider package) and the (blowout center) together are about a million pounds. And it takes an actual drilling apparatus to be able to (inaudible) it.

So what they did was, they put a second (inaudible) on the (inaudible) before (last port), (inaudible) solution. As they moved into (top drill), they stopped drilling on (each) (inaudible) and moved the drill rig over with the (blow out of air) ready to put it down and (inaudible) pressure with the mud (inaudible). That did not happen. (At this point that) (inaudible) (drilling) (inaudible) to (get back) (inaudible).

Next question.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from Martin Jornairo.

Q: Hello. (Inaudible) – from a report the Dutch government is sending over equipment that will be used to help drop the oil and separate it and put it back through the water. I believe those are – I don't have the right name for the term for it. But Radio Netherlands is reporting that the U.S. Coast Guard has requested the equipment to be sent over and ships. And we're sending them over this week.

ADM. ALLEN: We're looking at offers for foreign assistance. We're actually reaching out to foreign governments. Some of the equipment that is most valuable to us right now is skimming equipment. There are different types of skimmers. Some (Inaudible) – presence in other countries. We're actually reaching out to folks like the Netherlands and Canada and Mexico that have sources of supply for that. And in fact, we also have some aviation out of Canada that are assisting us as well.

I think it's essential to be in a containment scenario to the end of the drilling of the relief well and into hurricane season. We want to make sure that the type of resources we need on the water to be able to skim, to burn and so forth are what we need. So we're looking at every source of supply for these types of equipment. And that's the type of equipment we'll be bringing in.

Next question?

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Chuck Simmins.

Q: Good afternoon, Admiral. Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal. I wanted to ask about the live video feed if I could. It's caused quite a stir worldwide. But is it possible that it's providing both too much and not enough information, that it isn't portraying the true picture of what's going on?

ADM. ALLEN: Thank you for the question. I think you make a great point. I think we're in a little bit of a hard dilemma. Everybody wants as much information about this. They're frustrated. They're angry. They're mad. Everybody shares those symptoms. I think the graphic illustrations of that make it clear to everybody the problem we're dealing with. And it's created an urgency to do something about it.

On the other hand, we're looking at two-dimensional video. And sometimes, it's very hard to understand what it is you're seeing. We actually have a bunch of folks together to try and develop a full – (inaudible) – estimates and we had them welding on just the video and much larger-scale analysis of – (inaudible) – types of equipment. You'll actually get a – (inaudible) – that is more accurate than a lot of what we had before.

On the other hand, I think we need to understand that that is just what's going on there. While, we're frustrated and we're angry, we've got to keep our heads in the game We've got to keep our (chore) to the (wheel), if you will. And the America public's got to understand we've got to (bring) this thing through. We've got containment (inaudible), and we've got to work through (inaudible).

Next question?

OPERATOR: Your next – your next question comes from Jeff Amy.

Q: Good afternoon. One, will a recording be posted? The call quality, at least for me, has been extraordinarily wretched and I haven't understood most of it. Second is – Adm. Allen, you had mentioned at some point something about oil on the Mississippi Dauphin island. If you could just do that again and what is going on?

ADM. ALLEN: These are just from reports as I received as I walked in, so (inaudible) this information haven't actually (inaudible). So (inaudible) we understand, there are reported oil in contact in the western ports of a Mississippi town and reports of tar balls on Dauphin Island and Cheeney offshore. And we have teams that are going to investigate that right now. I don't have any more details. Reports are coming in as I started the press conference.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Tim Dickinson.

Q: Hi, Admiral. Tim Dickinson with Rolling Stone. First, can you characterize the actual chance of success of the relief wells? Is there a percentage attached to that? Everybody seems to be assuming that they will work. But given the success rate of everything else so far, that seems perhaps wishful thinking.

And the second question is has the Coast Guard made any effort throughout the course of this spill to obtain any sort of direct measurement, not a video estimate but an actual direct scientific measurement of the oil output?

ADM. ALLEN: Can you repeat the first question again? I'm sorry.

Q: What are the actual percentage chances of the success of the relief wells?

ADM. ALLEN: I'm not sure I would put a percentage to it. But I will tell you this, once it was known that the relief well was being drilled, we directed a second drill well we started as a risk mitigator. You have to understand this current well right now is about 18,000 feet deep. We're trying to intercept a pipe from a very long distance away. We thought it prudent to have a backup well dug and we continue to believe that. And we'll continue to drill the second while – until the first one is successful. And if we have to use the second one, we will. I'm not sure I want to put a percentage associated with that. But we're dealing with some pretty long distances here. We're not that far in really to this operation

Regarding the amount of oil, there was talk early on about whether 1,000 or 5,000 barrels was the right number. Early on in this response, we were pouring as much equipment out there – (inaudible) – believing that we could continue to contain this catastrophic spill, that our resources were not constrained by that effort. We were throwing them out as fast as we could.

However, ultimately – (inaudible) – trying to understand an official impact on the environment and long-term issues associated with the spill, we needed a better model to that. And to that end, Marcia McNutt stood up a Flow Rate Trajectory Technical Group under National Incident Command, and we revised those estimates significantly higher. We put those out last week. So while we have, I would say, better numbers, they're still in a range from 12 to 19,000 (barrels) was one model, and well over 12 to – 25,000 barrels a day

I would caution everybody, we're still dealing with information that's derived remotely – 5,000 feet down where there's no human access. And while we've gotten much better on the fidelity of the information, I think we're still working within a range here. And we'll continue to do that.

LT. CMDR. RUSSELL: Operator, we can take one more question.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from Josh Wingrove.

Q: Thank you, Admiral. Josh Wingrove from the "Globe and Mail" in Canada. What specifically will hurricane season mean for your game plan? What does that change, and how might you folks be changing what you do to deal with it?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, first of all, there's a standard readiness level that everybody goes through for hurricane season. As former commandant of the Coast Guard and I'm sure Adm. – (inaudible) – with whom you just spoke, they're already stood up at the higher readiness levels. That's one of the reasons Adm. Landry has returned to her duties. At the same time, we are assessing additional impact regarding the containment process that's going on right now. And if we get production started and are successful with either top hat or top hats, how we can stop that production, move – (inaudible) – off-scene if we have to. But also, as I mentioned earlier, to try and really – (inaudible) – them much more seaworthy and they will withstand the higher sea state so we don't have to deal

with the most extreme weather.

Thanks, folks.

OPERATOR: This does conclude today's call. You may now disconnect.

END

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