

Subject: Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 4, 2010

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Press Briefing by National Incident Commander June 4, 2010

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BATON ROUGE, La.

- Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen, National Incident Commander for the Deepwater Horizon BP oil spill response, briefed national and international media today on developments in the ongoing response. The briefing was a teleconference held at 8 a.m. Central Standard Time.

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

The entire transcript follows:

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Good morning. Thank you all for accommodating a phone-in call this morning. We're moving around rather rapidly and sometimes the logistics get complicated, and we do appreciate it.

I thought I'd start this morning with giving you a little update on the containment cap procedure that's going on at the wellhead, let you know what's gone on the last 24 hours.

As you know, we successfully were able to cut the pipe yesterday. And although we weren't able to use the diamond wire saw to give a fine cut that would allow us to put the top cap on, we do have a containment cap that was placed over and was successfully put in place yesterday.

Let me explain a little bit about what everybody may be seeing on the video because it's important you understand what is happening out there. When we first put the containment cap -- the first containment cap was put on, it filled up with hydrates which are a mixture of gas and water at very high pressure and low temperatures that create crystals that actually made the containment cap buoyant. The cap that was put on the well yesterday was designed to remedy some of those problems.

First of all, there were pins actually put into the cap that would allow us to actually vent oil until we were ready to bring it to the surface so it would not mix with water at low temperatures and form hydrates. They also had the opportunity to put methanol into the cap to reduce the presence of hydrates.

When the cap went down it was actually filled with an inert nitrogen gas to keep the oil from coming up until they're ready to produce. What you saw last night and what you will see throughout the day is slowly they're going to shut off the vents that are allowing the oil to escape around the edges of the containment cap. Just before midnight they were able to start bringing gas and oil to the surface -- start producing it. They will slowly bring up a production line and slowly close the vents where they're assuring that there's no water to get in. And then sometime later today we'll probably be able to get an assessment of exactly -- an approximation of how much oil we are capturing and able to produce, and it will probably be pretty visible at that time if there's any leakage around the edge of the containment cap.

Generally, progress is being made. I think we need to caution against over-optimism here. There's always been adjustments that

have to be made in the process as we move forward. But in general, progress is being made and it looks like we may be in a position to be able to go to production of whatever we're going to be able to pull out of the well in terms of gas and oil as we move forward.

I'm going to give you a couple of other updates and then I'm going to ask that Tracy Wareing, who's been working with us from FEMA on the claims process, also brief you. And when we're done with that we'll be glad to take any questions you may have for us.

In the last 24 hours, the southerly winds have pushed the northern limits of the spill up towards Mississippi, Alabama, and now the Panhandle of Florida. The continued southerly winds are putting increasing risk on the Mississippi, Alabama and Florida coasts. We've deployed Coast Guard units over there. We continue to deploy boom and skimmers.

We are talking with the local leaders there. I had a personal call with Governor Crist last night -- he requested more skimmers for Florida. We are attempting to source those right now.

I would say in general, what we're starting to see is this aggregation of what was never a monolithic spill into a number of smaller spills -- you heard me say this before -- the area of impact now because of the oil from the easterly wind that pushed it to the west of the (inaudible) a week or so ago, we now have a battle line, if you will, that stretches from Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, over to around the beaches by Pensacola, Florida. It's an extraordinarily wide area of beaches.

We continue to produce boom as rapidly as possible and distribute it to where it's needed most. Our focus in these last few days and these next few days obviously will be Alabama and Florida as we continue to deal with the issues and the oil on the beaches we already have in Louisiana.

The scope of this thing is to the point where it's rather unprecedented, and we'll continue to press for resources and work together with our local partners to do that.

I think, with that, I'll go to Tracy to talk about the claims process. And then we'll be happy to go to any questions you might have for us.

Tracy, are you ready to go?

MS. WAREING: Sure. Thank you, Admiral Allen. And good morning. Let me start by reiterating that BP is responsible for processing and paying claims. We are working hard to provide oversight and ensure that BP is handling claims expeditiously. We are pushing them to resolve issues both of immediate cash flow of families that have been impacted by the oil spill, and ongoing loss of income claims -- that they resolve those quickly.

As you may know, to file a claim, BP has a toll-free number: 1-800-440-0858. That line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If a claim is denied by BP -- and we have not had any claims denied to date -- but if a claim is denied by BP, that claim may be presented to the Coast Guard for relief from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund through the National Pollution Fund Center. The National Pollution Fund Center Claim Support number is also available at 1-800-280-7118.

Important to note under Admiral Allen we have established the Deepwater Integrated Services team to coordinate interagency support services for individuals, families, and small businesses that have been impacted by the oil spill. The focus of this group is designed to provide residents with full, streamlined access to all federal assistance programs and to ensure that, again, BP is resolving and paying claims that are made to it expeditiously.

This week the team -- the Integrated Services team conducted site visits in the Gulf states to gather information about the challenges faced by families impacted by the spill. These visits included many of the points of entry for individuals and businesses who are seeking compensation from BP, such as the claim centers, or who require assistance from other federal programs such as Small Business Administration, one-stop career centers, and other types of supportive services for families.

Within the Deepwater Integrated Services team, we have established field-based interagency teams for each state to help identify the gaps in the claims process and try to reach quick resolution with BP. These teams are led by a single federal resource coordinator and a state point of contact that has been identified by each of the governors. The teams are designed to ensure that BP is held responsible for every claim and to provide residents with full, again, streamlined access to federal assistance programs -- really an approach of "no wrong door" in ensuring that people can quickly get the support they need given the impact on them and their families.

We do understand that BP has identified a representative for each state to help conduct quality assurance and troubleshooting for the claims process. They did that this week or within the past week. And we understand that these consultants are working to make the claims intake and processing smoother for families and small businesses, and we will continue to work with them to make that happen.

And with that, I will turn it back over to the admiral.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Thank you, very much, Tracy. We can go to questions at this point.

Q Thank you for taking my call. Yesterday afternoon, the Unified Command released a press report saying that tar balls and oil sheen had been spotted in the Florida Keys and were being tested. And I'm wondering have those test results come back? We've gotten conflicting reports about those. And if so, what are the results of those tests?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: They are being tested. To my knowledge, we have no confirmation they are associated with this spill. But I will double-check that after this call. If there's anything other than that, I will get back to you. (Inaudible) -- we had actually done the mechanical cleanup of what was recoverable in terms of tar balls.

Q Hi, Admiral. I'm wondering, you guys say you planned for a worst-case scenario. What's the plan for a strong hurricane coming mid-August when you guys are trying to finish up drilling the relief well?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: That's a great question. One of the things we may want to look at in the future is when we look for a worst-case scenario, we look at a discharge and the equipment needed to deal with that particular discharge. I don't think any response plan ever contemplated response over this long period of time moving into a hurricane season that we'll probably have to look at when this is over. That said, we are looking into a number of options, including how we're going to coordinate not only our response but BP's actions to contain the spill at the source.

Q What about, though, people getting oil like in their homes and you know Corexit in their homes as the storm surge washes on the shore? What are the plans for that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: We actually had a question about that yesterday and I'm going to summarize it -- and if we have to give you a more detailed answer, I can give it to you later. Basically, if oil enters a home as a result of a hurricane there's a relationship to the flood insurance. And if the flood insurance doesn't cover it, this is a claim that can be made against BP or the Coast Guard Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund and can be dealt with, ma'am.

Q Okay.

Q Thank you for taking this call. I had a question about the estimates of marshlands that had been impacted. I know one of the parishes down in Louisiana was estimating I think 3,000 acres had been impacted. I wonder if you've been able to evaluate that claim.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Actually, I talked to the parish presidents for the last couple of days and what we need to do is align our estimates -- we do linear shoreline, and obviously, there's an area behind the shoreline involving marshes that could be impacted, as well. And I asked my folks to come up with a metric where we could combine both linear miles of shoreline and acres. We're doing that right now. We'll make that available to everybody tomorrow. But it's a task that I put out after I talked with parish presidents.

Q Admiral, thank you. It was mentioned earlier that there would be a new -- or that the spill group, the spill rate group was still working on revised estimates. Can you give us any progress on that and advise how this is going to be dealt with as things go forward and presumably the cap becomes more effective at capturing oil?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Happy to do that. As you know we had the flow rate technical group put together two estimates based on two different models -- one was 12,000 to 19,000 barrels a day; the other one was 12,000 to 25,000 barrels a day. What they also provided us with was their best estimate of what might happen after they cut the riser pipe, because it was unknown whether or not that kink in the pipe, which is now gone, was inhibiting oil from coming out that might come out at a greater rate once the pipe was cut.

Their indication was if that was the case, that the flow rate could increase as much as 20 percent. We're looking at the videos now. As you know this is a work in progress as they're putting the containment cap on. Once the containment cap is on and is working, it will not be an issue. We hope that the rate would be significantly reduced. But in this interim period of time between the cut of the riser pipe and the establishment of the containment cap, the estimate is it could be as much as 20 percent. And we're seeing a lot of oil there, but, again, it should be starting to diminish as we close the valves and start to go into production today.

Q Good morning, Admiral. How much of the oil does the dome have the capacity to capture?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I don't think it's a matter of capacity inside the dome, it's a question of rate. The dome -- actually, we're calling it a containment cap. The cap is structured so that it can cover the pipe with a rubber gasket around it. It's not a perfect seal, so if there's enough pressure the oil can actually get through the rubber gasket and get out.

What we're trying to do is create the ability to handle the flow coming up through the well bore and then produce -- at the ship over the top of the site by flaring off natural gas and actually producing oil as they would at a regular well.

By keeping the pressure down and being able to produce the gas and oil, there will be less of a need to have the oil try and seek

some other way out through the field. So the notion is what we're looking for is an effective way to deal with the oil flow, not necessarily the volume metric capability inside the cap. It has to be just enough to get it focused up and up the pipe and not have too much downward pressure that it would go through the rubber seal.

Q What's the top rate of flow it can capture, though, it can take up?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: They're going to have to figure that out. And as they -- what they do is they're slowly reducing the inert hydrogen head on the pipe itself, and they went into production around midnight last night and they're slowly moving up. I got an anecdotal report and I wouldn't put it out as an estimate because I don't think it is, but I think they're up to around 1,000 barrels a day right now and slowly closing the vents and increasing the flow of the oil up to see how much they can produce. But I would take that 1,000 barrels as a very, very rough estimate, anecdotal, as of a certain point where we were last night.

Q Thank you, Admiral Allen. My question is, can you commit to giving us, I would say, getting publicly a list of the contractors that BP is using, at least the major ones? And if not, why not?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I don't know why there would be a problem in doing that. I will look into it and we'll give you a statement back on that. We're doing this by cell phone so I'm going to ask the folks here taking notes to make a note of that. I don't see any reason why we can't provide that.

Q Hi, Admiral. The question I had was -- I just want to make sure I'm clear on exactly how -- exactly this dynamic of what's going on right now. So when we saw the containment cap actually placed on there and saw the oil, that was expected that this oil would be coming out because the vents had not been closed at this point? And -- so I guess that's the first part of the question.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: That is correct. They wanted a way to make sure the oil could be released without mixing with the water down there at low temperature to create hydrates. They only want to start bringing oil up -- oil and gas up through the pipe for production when they know there's not a chance that hydrates could be formed. And there's two ways to do that -- is wait until you've got the flow coming up is pure oil and natural gas, and the way you do that is have a way for the extra oil to thin out so there's no way for water to get in. In other words, the oil is actually keeping pressure going out of the containment capsule -- water cannot come in.

As they slowly close those vents, more oil will go up and that also allows us to put methanol in, which will reduce the presence of hydrates. Was that a little clearer?

Q Yes. And how many vents are there and how long does that process take?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I think they're looking towards later on today to -- what they're going to do is they're going to slowly increase the pressure in the pipe for production to close the vents. And this is kind of -- it's almost like -- probably allow the analogy -- I'll give you two: one is the clutch on a car when you're letting it out. The other one is if you were to put your finger over the top of a straw and put it into a glass of water and then slowly lift your finger off every once in a while so the straw would fill up with water. Kind of a combination of those two things where you're trying to manage two different types of pressure and slowly fill a pipe with nothing but the product that's coming from the reservoir and turn that into production.

Is that a little more helpful?

Q Yes, I think so.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Okay. And I'm not sure on the number of valves -- the vents. I think it's four, but we'll confirm that.

Q And this was expected, right, that -- I mean, the vents -- because I guess I hadn't heard about the vents idea before, but it was expected that at first when the cap was placed on that there wouldn't be an -- there would be some seepage of the oil before these vents were closed?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: This was designed in based on the failures of the first containment cap, especially in regards to hydrates. That was expected. That's the reason we said in that interim period until we were up and producing, there could be an increased flow up to 20 percent. And were in that interim period and it should start to reduce today as we go into production.

Q Okay, thanks.

Q Admiral, good morning. I have a question -- are there any plans -- if this containment cap is found to not capture enough oil, are there any plans to use any other options after this to --

ADMIRAL ALLEN: There are. We have the option to go back in at some point and see if we can redo the diamond wire cut and get a finer cut that would allow us to put a more -- a capsule which results in less oil being released around the rubber seal. I think we need to have this operate for a while, though, to see what kind of efficiency we're getting out of any kind of leakage that we see.

I might also add that I didn't mention earlier -- we have a wand down there. We are treating the oil that is coming out of there with subsea dispersants as well to try and minimize the impact on the surface of the oil that's coming out while we shift to the containment cap.

Q Good morning, gentlemen. I just want to be perfectly clear on how the seal is working. You mentioned the nitrogen. Is the nitrogen being pumped down the pipe from the drill ship into the cap? And is the methanol, was it already in the cap or is it being pumped down into the cap? And will that take place until the vents close and the seal is tight?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Everything that's going down into the cap is coming from the ship above it. And the notion is that you slowly reduce the nitrogen pressure, you inject methanol, and you allow the oil to vent until you're sure you've got a pure product mixture inside the containment cap that can move up for production. And the goal here, as I stated before, is to prevent the development of the hydrates, which result from high-pressure, low-temperature meeting of water and the natural gas that's contained in the hydrocarbons that are coming up, which defeated the last containment device.

Q Okay. And so do you expect to -- for that process to continue throughout the day and by the end of the day you expect those vents to close and then you'll be able to -- will we be able to visually see less oil seeping out?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: You should be able to do that. And what we'll do is we'll monitor it throughout the day and once we get some idea on the production rates and we get some clarity on the pressure readings, we'll make that public.

Q Oh, wonderful. Thank you, appreciate it.

Q Good morning, Admiral.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Good morning.

Q I spoke -- I was down in Venice yesterday and I spoke with the Sierra Club and its president, who had just come in from touring the Barataria Bay where he said there was a lot of mass oiling of pelicans and dolphins. And Michael Brune, the president, said he was struck by the futility of the cleanup effort and he said there really is no effective way to clean up an oil spill; that the boom, even when it's in place, is not very effective when you have wave action that pushes the oil inland into marshes or over pelican rookeries. And he said that there's few boats -- few if any boats out there doing rescues of oiled birds and dolphins.

And as you probably know, referring to the requests you're getting for skimmers, skimmers are only effective when the seas are like four feet or less. So I'm wondering if you could comment -- I mean, you're talking about the battle line being drawn on the coast. I mean, what should people along the coast realistically expect of protective booms, cleanups, and the realistic of -- cleaning up in this disaster?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, I think you've done a very good job at describing the vexing situation that exists out there, especially in the lower area in Barataria Bay and Plaquemines Parish where there is a lot of marshland. There is no good solution when oil enters a marshland. And as we know, boom can be defeated by seascape -- it has to go over or under the top of it, depending on environmental conditions.

And skimming is very, very difficult. And if you use mechanical means back in the marshes, you do as much harm to the marshes as the oil might do. And, in some cases, you're faced with the prospect of either an in-situ burn or just to let it biodegrade.

And the real issue is to stop this thing at the source, do maximum skimming, in-situ burning -- deal with it as far off shore as possible, and do everything you can to keep it from getting to shore, because once it's into the marshes, quite frankly, I think we would all agree there's no good solution at that point.

That's the reason I think it's incumbent on us to really attack this containment at the source. And I think definitely, as you heard me mention earlier, as this spill proliferates into smaller spills from south-central Louisiana and clear into Pensacola, Florida, it's going to significantly stress not only boom production capability of the country, but the ability of skimmers. And we are working very, very hard to do that.

A few scenarios involved in oil spill planning contemplated, that brought an area of defense of a spill and it's emblematic of the anomalous nature of this spill and why it's difficult for everybody. But we're working as hard as we can.

Q I understand that. Can you tell me what kind of help can be mustered to help rescue more pelicans and dolphins and other marine life? I know the Wildlife and Fisheries Service is probably one of the smaller of the federal agencies.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, regarding mammals and wildlife, we have centers for cleaning them and dealing with them. I would ask everybody to go to deepwaterhorizonresponse.com. There are several sites that are connected to that if you want to volunteer or want to get involved in this, or hear more about it, you can do that. We are linked to different centers that deal with both birds and stranded mammals and so forth. And there's information there. And if everybody would like to become involved and volunteer, that

is a good place to check for all that.

Q You mean to actually go out and do the rescues? The centers aren't -- until last night, they didn't seem to be getting very many birds or mammals.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, we'll double-check back with our incident command post down there. But if anybody has any issues related to that, I'd recommend they go to that website, and I will have the incident commander follow up with the Sierra Club.

Q Thank you.

Q Hello, Admiral. I just -- forgive me, because I'm asking you to repeat the timeline on this. But with regards to the cap, right now you say the 1,000-barrel rough estimate refers to exactly what? I wasn't sure about that.

ADMIRAL ALLEN: I got a report -- again, this is very anecdotal -- that as they're trying to close the vents, release the nitrogen pressure and start bringing the oil to the surface, they now are producing small quantities of gas and oil, which is what they want to do. And then, what they want to do is slowly increase production to the point where they have a flow where they can seal the vents where the oil is leaving the containment cap right now, and then push as much of the product up the pipe, produce it, and then create less pressure in and around that rubber seal where oil could be released.

And I got an email an hour or so ago that at some point this morning, they thought they were approaching around 1,000 barrels. That's the reason I say it's anecdotal. That's not the total capacity. I don't put much credence in it right now. It's just a point that they are passing as they're trying to go to the fullest point of production they can get to. Was that helpful?

Q It's fair to say that you would have a better sense of what kind of production you are looking at or longer than that?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: As I noted earlier, once we get better production numbers throughout the day, we will put those out to everybody.

Q Okay, thank you.

Q Thanks for taking my call, Admiral. When they made the cut, it seemed to me that it was pretty clear that the oil gushing out increased. Is that a pretty fair assessment?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, as I said, we estimated that it could be as much as 20 percent more, depending on whether or not that kink was actually inhibiting more oil from flowing to the riser pipe. So we predicted it could be as much as 20. I think we're going to have to go back and analyze the video. And, as you know, a lot of obstructions were placed in there as the containment cap went down.

But our own estimates -- and, again, this is from our working group who has been looking at this for a long time -- was it could be as much as 20 percent as we put the cap on. Of course, that should go away as we close the vents and go into production.

Q Right, I mean, I know that that was a possibility that it could be as much as 20 percent. But as soon as it was snipped, I mean, it was pretty clear with the naked eye that there was an increase, correct?

ADMIRAL ALLEN: Well, it appears to be -- I would caution everybody, because as we went back and tried to actually redo the estimates that led to our ranges we have right now of 12,000-19,000 barrels a day, and 12,000-25,000 a day, we did some exhaustive research on the data that was available, including looking at frame-by-frame video at the NOAA war room out at Sand Point in Seattle to try and bring all this stuff together under Marcia McNutter of the U.S. Geological Survey. And these folks, together looking at what they had, estimated that that was the flow.

I think we're going to have to analyze this and tell us -- have it tell us what we think the pictures mean. But I would tell you that it's only an interim step from the time the pipe was cut until a containment cap is on. As we start going into production, there will be a period of time -- we'll measure it in hours -- when the oil was out there flowing. And we'll come up with our best estimate of what was lost in and above our flow rate during that period of putting the containment cap on. And we'll make that public when we're able to make the estimate.

Q Thank you.

For information about the response effort, visit www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com.

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