

DEQ Participates In Offshore Oil Port Drill

On May 24, 2012, representatives from several state, local and federal agencies gathered at the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port's Small Boat Harbor in Port Fourchon, Louisiana, for participation in an oil spill drill conducted by the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port (LOOP), LLC.

LOOP's responsibility is to ensure for the safe offloading of foreign crude oil from tankers, proper storage of the oil and the subsequent transportation of the oil via connecting pipelines to refineries throughout the U.S. Gulf Coast and Midwest. As a component of their mission, LOOP holds a major annual drill as a practice tool designed to bring many agencies and resources together in order to test the responsiveness to a crude oil spill scenario.

This year's scenario took place at the LOOP Small Boat Harbor facility in Port Fourchon, and involved the identification of a significant discharge of crude oil along the dock that was a result of an overflowing sump at the facility. LOOP took the opportunity to deploy boom and a variety of oil skimmers as both a component of the drill response and as a demonstration for the attendees.

Participants included representatives from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality as well as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office, the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, the Louisiana Offshore Terminal Authority, the Greater Lafourche Port Commission, the Lafourche Parish Harbor Patrol as well as officials from other agencies and contracting firms.

After introductions and a safety briefing, the scenario was initiated with deployment of the containment boom followed by a demonstration of at least three types of oil skimmer models on hand at the LOOP facility.



DEQ Environmental Scientists Pat Breaux (left) and Jeff Dauzat (right) observe placement of containment boom during the drill

The multi-party effort enabled the participants to interact in a face-to-face format while observing LOOP's oil containment resources as the exercise unfolded. All of the participating parties worked as a team to review and assess the status reports in preparation for a unified response, with the ultimate goal of minimizing the environmental threat by containing the oil spill and addressing any associated health and safety concerns.

Attendees were given the opportunity to go out on a recovery ship in order to get a closer inspection of the 700 feet of 18" containment boom as it was deployed by LOOP small boat operators at the mouth of Evans Canal, an inlet located directly across from the facility.

In the wake of the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon platform oil spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico, drills such as these are vital as a precautionary and pre-planning measure to marshal Louisiana's environmental protection resources and initiate a comprehensive response plan in anticipation of a real event.

"This exercise serves as an important training tool that tests the effectiveness of the various responding agencies and contractors as they work together to address a major oil spill within Louisiana waters," said Jeff Dauzat, DEQ Environmental Scientist. "Minimizing the potential health and environmental impact is DEQ's priority, and our role in this scenario is to provide support and technical assistance to the Louisiana Oil Spill Coordinator's Office in the response."



LOOP deploys a Walosep W-4 model oil skimmer during the drill

DEQ took part in media briefings throughout the exercise, where participating parties exchanged status reports concerning their efforts regarding containment and recovery. The media event culminated in an on-camera mock press conference between agency public information officers and a gallery of reporters.

The exercise concluded with general comments and an opportunity for spectators and participants to voice any strengths and weaknesses, along with suggestions that could be utilized for future drills.