

2010 CONFERENCE SUMMARY

3rd International Regulators' Offshore Safety Conference, 18-20 October 2010 Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Conference Summary

With concern about the safety of offshore oil and gas operations at unprecedented levels, a diverse group of regulators, operators, contractors, industry associations and workers representatives gathered in Vancouver to exchange views and plan for the future. Speakers included safety, operational, and regulatory experts from government, industry, academia, and labor, and a distinguished Canadian judge. The interactive conference program provided all delegates with the opportunity to present their views about the Montara and Macondo blowouts, safety management and regulatory concepts, technology and operating procedures, continuous improvement strategies, performance measures, standards, helicopter safety, and international cooperation. The roundtable sessions, during which small groups discussed safety issues and agreed on findings and recommendations, were particularly popular and effective.

The post-conference comments of Leif Sandberg, a delegate from Nexen (Norway), reflected the view of many of the 200 attendees when he described the conference as “inspiring.” He and other participants particularly liked the mix of presentations and roundtable discussions that enabled attendees to both “contribute and receive” opinions and information. The delegates also praised the extensive networking opportunities that the conference provided.

A central theme that emerged from the presentations and discussions was the need for a strong and vibrant safety culture. Delegates agreed that certain regulatory and management practices are more conducive to developing and sustaining such a culture. The consensus findings and recommendations of the conference, which provide guidance for assessing and improving offshore safety programs, are summarized below.

- Regulatory regimes function most effectively when a single entity has broad safety and pollution prevention responsibility. Gaps, overlap, and confusion are not in the interest of safety or regulatory efficiency.
- The regulator's core responsibilities and objectives must be clearly identified. Managers must minimize distractions so that regulatory personnel can focus on these objectives.
- Safety management and regulatory priorities should be identified through a comprehensive risk assessment program. Training and competency development programs should be updated to reflect the new risk information. Contracting strategies should be reviewed to assess their safety and risk implications.
- Government and industry should promote an improvement mentality, not a compliance mentality. Continuous communication among regulators, operators, contractors, workers, industry associations and public interest groups is essential for continuous improvement.
- Operators and contractors must manage their companies to achieve safety objectives and must continually assess the effectiveness of their management programs. Regulators should challenge industry to resolve potential safety problems rather than seek to resolve the problems for them.

- Regulators should serve as catalysts for learning by distributing information, hosting workshops, participating in research, and identifying gaps in standards and best practices. Wherever possible, the best standards should be identified and applied internationally.
- Accident investigations should be conducted independently and findings should be promptly and broadly distributed. Industry or government should maintain comprehensive and verified incident data bases. Offshore companies should regularly discuss the causes and implications of past accidents with their employees.
- Industry and government cannot rely solely on incident data to identify risks. New indicators must be explored and assessed, particularly for major hazards and safety culture. Worker input is also essential.
- Peer-based audit programs should be considered for both regulators and operators.
- Industry and regulators should make better use of technology for real time monitoring of safety parameters.
- Sustaining outstanding safety performance is critical to the reputation of industry and government. All personnel should be trained to be safety leaders and should be empowered to stop work without blame.
- Industry and government should Investigate other actions and programs that might help promote, sustain, and monitor a culture of safety achievement.

Conference delegates agreed that they must sustain the momentum from Vancouver and continue to cooperate on safety initiatives. In response to this recommendation, the International Regulators' Forum (IRF) is considering initiatives that will build on the cooperative spirit evident in Vancouver and the excellent input from provided by conference delegates. The IRF will update delegates on these initiatives by the end of the year.