The Post-Macondo World: Two Years After the Spill

During the 87 days that followed the 20 April 2010 explosion on board the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in the US Gulf of Mexico (GOM), an estimated 4.9 million bbl of oil flowed from the Macondo well. This is the fourth-largest offshore oil spill, based on official estimates, to have occurred worldwide (see sidebar on World’s Largest Oil Spills).

Response to the shock of this event continues in the human impetus not only to regain levels of economic health that prevailed before the blowout but also to put in place people, technology, and systems whose job is to ensure such a disaster is unlikely to occur again. There is also an ongoing effort by environmental scientists to gain understanding of how the spill has impacted other life forms—both plant and animal—as well as the land and ocean.

Seeking Regulatory Oversight Balance

A 6-month moratorium was placed 27 May 2010 on new deepwater drilling (500 ft or greater) in the GOM. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar lifted the moratorium less than 5 months later, on 12 October, “provided that operators certify compliance with all existing rules and requirements, including those that recently went into effect, and demonstrate the availability of adequate blowout containment resources.”

Despite oil and gas industry fears that the long-term impact of stepped-up permitting requirements would be catastrophically negative, 355 deepwater permits requiring subsea containment capabilities have been approved since mid-February 2011. These are for 102 unique wells, with 24 permits pending and 21 permits returned to the operator with requests for additional information, particularly information regarding containment. For deepwater activities not requiring subsea containment, 64 permits have been approved, with one permit pending and one permit returned to the operator with requests for additional information; such activities include water injection wells and procedures using surface blowout preventers (BOPs).

In addition, 121 new shallow-water well permits have been issued since the implementation of new safety and environmental standards on 8 June 2010. Seven of these permits are pending, with seven having been returned to the operator for more information.

During a conference call 16 February to discuss fourth-quarter earnings, Schlumberger Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Paal Kibsgaard told analysts that the rig count in the GOM could return to pre-Macondo levels by the end of 2012. “We are quite optimistic in terms of the outlook for the Gulf of Mexico,” he said. “We see steady growth in deepwater drilling rig counts during 2012, roughly about a rig a month. So we would be at pre-Macondo levels for drilling rigs in the deepwater by the latter part of 2012.”
Looking for more?

Some of the OnePetro partner societies have developed subject-specific wikis that may help.
PetroWiki was initially created from the seven volume Petroleum Engineering Handbook (PEH) published by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE).

The SEG Wiki is a useful collection of information for working geophysicists, educators, and students in the field of geophysics. The initial content has been derived from Robert E. Sheriff’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Geophysics, fourth edition.
BP Plc CEO Robert Dudley’s second over-$7-bn deal this year signals a shift for BP toward the world’s fastest-growing economies as exploration drilling remains closed in the US after the Macondo oil spill. 2 million barrels of oil from BP spill may be on ocean floor. 28 Oct, 2014, 02.32 PM IST.

One unsolved puzzle is the location of two million barrels of submerged oil thought to be trapped in the deep ocean, researchers said. BP partner refuses to pay $1.2-bn oil spill bill. 04 Aug, 2010, 11.22 PM IST. The spill drove a push in science and some changes in regulations, but the dangers of offshore drilling remain. “It took the better part of six to seven years [after the disaster] to get in place the inspection of blowout preventers and rules about making drilling plans safer and putting commonsense regulations in place, but those have been rescinded,” says Ian MacDonald, a scientist at Florida State University. PDF

Seven years after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, this study measures the “ultimate” cost of the disaster. This study compiles all the costs to people impacted by the spill. Release of an estimated 134 million to 206 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico context. Five years after the spill, the number of accidents and injuries per oil-producing well has increased, according to Interior Department statistics. Between 2009 and 2014, the overall number of oil- and gas-producing wells dropped about 20 percent, and accidents and incidents associated with drilling in the Gulf of Mexico dropped 14 percent. But during that period, accidents and injuries per producing well increased by about 7 percent. “The industry’s overall safety record was strong before Macondo, and the co-chairs of President Obama’s national spill commission were absolutely right when they said that offshore drilling is now even safer,” said Jack N. Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute, which lobbies for the oil industry.