BP releases environmental data related to 2010 U.S. Gulf oil spill

BP has released a vast amount of environmental data it uses in its efforts to clean up the Gulf of Mexico, where the company's Macondo well spilled millions of barrels of oil in 2010.

The company is planning to publish data on everything from aquatic life and birds to Gulf shorelines and environmental toxicology, but BP's first data dump includes 2.3 million lines of water chemistry data and measures the amount of crude-related chemicals that were in the ocean. BP also published data on the composition and degradation of the oil released from its well.

The data were collected to help guide clean-up efforts under the direction of the U.S. Coast Guard and to support efforts by state and federal agencies and BP to evaluate potential injury to natural resources in the Gulf of Mexico as part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process.

The data are being published on a new website — http://gulfsciencedata.bp.com. It is in addition to another website the company launched earlier to "set the record straight" on the Gulf. The second site is an attempt to allow interested outsiders to use the environmental data in scientific studies or to come to their own conclusions about the Gulf, BP said.

The company has collected the data alongside government agencies since the 86-day spill began in April 2010, and releasing it now "will enhance Gulf-related scientific research and improve the public's understanding of the condition of the Gulf of Mexico," said Laura Folse, BP's executive vice president for response and environmental restoration, in a written statement.

Data to be published in the future include samples that are now in various stages of analysis, validation, and quality control review. Users will have to register an email account with the company to get into BP's spreadsheets and maps.

So far, the company has spent about $14 billion on its response to the spill and clean-up. BP is still in legal fights over America's worst oil spill.

MSRC inks remote sensing contract with Ocean Imaging

The Marine Spill Response Corporation (MSRC) has signed an exclusive contract with Ocean Imaging Corp. for cutting edge remote sensing capability. Ocean Imaging will provide its proprietary aerial surveillance technology as part of MSRC's overall strategy for enhancing the ability to tactically position response resources in the optimal areas of oil migration for responding to spills.

"It takes a complete systems approach to effectively respond to oil spills," said Steve Benz, MSRC's president and chief executive officer. "While much of the regulatory compliance focus to date has been on skimmer throughput capacity, the reality is that the skimmer is just one component — and not necessarily the most important component in combating oil spills. It is imperative to determine the location of oil that is most recoverable — whether day or night — and stay in that oil as time moves on. Getting it wrong can mean that response resources have largely been wasted."

Benz added: "Our new arrangement with Ocean Imaging, available exclusively through MSRC, will significantly enhance our overall effectiveness during a response."

MSRC has developed a multi-tiered approach to remote sensing in order to complement and expand on traditional human aerial spotting. This approach is based on the concept that "height of eye" and "vertical viewing angle" are key to any surveillance. The technology provided by Ocean Imaging enables MSRC to significantly enhance its day and night aerial remote sensing through infrared-multi-spectral technology.

"We are pleased to partner with MSRC as the leading U.S. Oil Spill Removal Organization (OSRO)," Dr. Jan Svejkovsky, president of Ocean Imaging, said. "Ocean Imaging has a decades-long history in unique, innovative remote sensing technology development and its transfer to operational use, including ocean condition maps for fishing fleets to monitoring changes in coastal ecosystems to tracking spilled oil at sea."

"Our technology was used nearly every day for over 3 months on the Deepwater Horizon spill," Svejkovsky added, "and we have capitalized on that experience with further enhancements going forward."

Ocean Imaging systems were designed to be portable in nature. As such, they will be mounted in MSRC-contracted planes on all three coasts for rapid deployment. The oil characterization capability of these systems will be used for real-time tactical use in spills, providing a second set of eyes for determining actionable oil versus sheens, filtering out false targets that are always a challenge to the human eye, and providing information at night to expand the operating window.

Proprietary Ocean Imaging technology also makes available wide-area oil mapping that can be a critical feed to the Common Operating Picture (COP) at the strategic response level. "Having a lifetime of experience working on transferring science research results to operational use, this collaboration with MSRC is by far one of the most needed and immediate," Svejkovsky said.

BSEE cites 12 operators for SEMS violations, stops operations on five

The U.S. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) has cited 12 offshore operators for failing to demonstrate compliance with the Safety and Environmental Management Systems (SEMS) requirements of the Workplace Safety Rule, 30 CFR Subpart S. Of the 12 operators, BSEE director Brian Salerno directed five to halt operations for failure to provide a safety audit plan and completed audit by the deadline. The other seven companies have submitted audit plans that comply with the regulations but did not complete the audits by the 15 November deadline. BSEE said it may take other enforcement measures, including civil penalties for each day of non-compliance. Each of those seven companies was required to immediately supply BSEE with a copy of its SEMS program, have the chief executive certify under penalty of perjury that the company has implemented the plan, and complete the audit without delay.