

**STATEMENT OF  
VICE ADMIRAL SALERNO  
DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS  
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY  
AND MINERAL RESOURCES HEARING ON  
“NORTH AMERICAN OFFSHORE ENERGY: MEXICO AND  
CANADA BOUNDARY TREATIES AND NEW DRILLING BY CUBA  
AND BAHAMAS”**

**November 2, 2011**

Good Morning Chairman LAMBORN, Ranking Member HOLT, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I am pleased to have this opportunity to answer any questions you may have on the U.S. Coast Guard’s response capability and readiness for oil spills originating in foreign waters adjacent to the United State that may affect or threaten our Nation and our natural resources.

**SUMMARY**

Protecting the marine environment from oil spills is an important Coast Guard mission. Contingency planning, training, and exercises are fundamental to our readiness to respond to oil

spills. These in turn have their foundation in the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP).

Contingency planning under the NCP occurs at several levels:

- Local level planning is conducted by an Area Committee, under the guidance of the Coast Guard captain of the port, who is also pre-designated as the Federal On Scene Coordinator for the coastal zone. The area committee brings together federal, state, local, and Tribal officials and responders to identify risks, sensitive areas to be protected, and protection strategies.
- At the regional level, Coast Guard Districts participate with other federal agencies and state officials, through Regional Response Team, on such issues as dispersant use and in-situ burning pre-authorizations;

- And finally at the national level, the Coast Guard serves as the vice chair of the National Response Team, which is comprised of 16 federal agencies with environmental response functions, and ensures national level capabilities are available as needed to support response efforts.

### **International Partnerships**

Each of these organizational levels also has a role to play in developing strategies and cooperative relationships with foreign neighbors to enhance preparedness and response to transboundary environmental threats. In particular, we have well established relationships with Canada, Russia and Mexico to achieve cooperation on:

- potential pollution threats,
- identification of equipment and personnel resources available to respond to incidents, and

- procedures and protocols for notification, incident management, and coordinating a spill response.

In each of these cases, cooperation in controlling the source of the pollution is paramount in addressing the transnational nature of the threat. Facilitating movement of essential people and equipment to the source is an essential component of these agreements.

Additionally, these agreements include regular joint planning sessions and exercises; they also help sponsor and support bi-lateral cooperation in oil spill research and development.

For example, we conducted

- a major bi-lateral response exercise with Mexico in San Diego this past August;

- and we successfully completed a joint U.S. Coast Guard/Canadian Coast Guard Environmental Response Summit last month.

Just yesterday I hosted a Russian delegation here in Washington, and signed a Bi-lateral Memorandum of Understanding that will expand our current cooperative response agreements to cover the entire U.S./Russian boundary waters.

### **Preparedness in the Northern Caribbean**

While we can point to successes and healthy relationships in the areas already mentioned, we do not have the same bi-lateral ability to engage with all countries which are potential sources of transboundary pollution threats. This is particularly true in the northern Caribbean, and the anticipated deepwater drilling in the Cuban EEZ is the salient example. However, we are taking steps to engage multi-laterally in the Caribbean. By working through

the IMO we have garnered support to convene a multilateral seminar this December in the Bahamas that will invite Caribbean nations to discuss oil spill prevention and response issues.

Consequently, we are working extensively with our domestic response partners to update our contingency plans. We are also engaged directly with REPSOL, the Spanish-owned company which plans to drill the first well in the Cuban offshore starting in January 2012, related to their response strategies, resources, and capabilities in support of their drilling operations.

In the event that an oil spill does occur within the Cuban EEZ, the Coast Guard would mount an immediate response under the NCP, in partnership with other Federal, State and local agencies. And we would focus on combating the spill as far offshore and as close to the source as possible, using all viable response tactics. In preparation for such an eventuality, our Seventh District in Miami has been working closely with state,

local and response organizations in Southern Florida since March. Our District Office will conduct a response exercise this month.

### **Conclusion**

As was highlighted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, any spill of national significance, regardless of its source, will require unity of effort across all levels of government, industry, and the private sector.

Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.