The oil and gas industry is committed to meet the world’s energy needs while maintaining safe, environmentally sound and socially responsible operations.

OIL SPILL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE: WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The industry constantly aims to minimize risks from its operations and is committed to pursuing improved performance in terms of oil spill prevention, preparedness and response. Oil spills can significantly affect the environment and surrounding local communities. Even with sophisticated safety measures in place, the risk of an oil spill remains. As new oil and gas resources in remote and sensitive environments are developed, there are new risks and challenges that oil spill response measures need to address.

PREVENTION IS A MUST
While the amount of oil produced and transported has increased as the world’s economy has expanded, the overall number of large spills has significantly decreased. This reduction is primarily due to efforts by companies operating throughout the oil supply chain to develop more effective preventive measures.

Preventing spills requires preparedness and continuous improvement in every phase of operations where oil is produced, transported or stored.

Exploration and production facilities use advanced technologies, materials and practices, with multiple back-up safety systems to prevent spills. Computers, electromagnetic instruments, and ultrasonic devices that detect weak spots are used to monitor pipelines so they can be repaired before a leak develops.

The design of cargo vessels and marine terminals is constantly being improved. Tankers, for example, are built with double hulls, and storage tanks are constructed from special materials that withstand corrosion.

BE PREPARED
While oil spill prevention is the ultimate goal, the importance of response readiness is taken very seriously by the industry.
Global Industry Response Group

Following two similar accidents at offshore oil wells – the Montara spill in the Timor Sea off Australia in 2009 and the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 – the upstream oil and gas industry established a special Global Industry Response Group (GIRG). GIRG aims to prevent similar incidents and, should they take place, reduce their impact and accelerate any necessary cleanup.

This initiative led to the formation of three new entities responsible for managing and implementing the delivery of GIRG’s recommendations. ■ OGP’s Wells Expert Committee: this committee, composed of representatives from offshore operators, as well as the two drilling contractors and wells servicing associate members, is working to analyse well incident report data, advocate harmonised standards, communicate good practice and promote continued research and development.

■ OGP’s Subsea Well Response Project: this group, made up of nine major oil companies, is working to design a capping toolbox with a range of equipment to allow wells to be shut in, to design additional hardware for the subsea injection of dispersant and to further assess the need for and feasibility of global containment solutions.

■ IPIECA and OGP’s Oil Spill Response Joint Industry Project: this group, composed of 14 member companies, is managing GIRG’s recommendations on oil spill response. This body is developing new recommended practices, improving understanding of oil spill response tools and methodologies, and enhancing co-ordination between key stakeholders internationally.

Through IPIECA and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the oil and gas industry and governments have been working together for over two decades to improve oil spill preparedness and response globally. IPIECA provides a high level strategic network for companies to establish good practice by sharing and discussing oil spill preparedness and response issues.

Its network enables training of emergency response personnel in government departments and oil companies so they are prepared for and can respond rapidly and effectively to oil spills wherever and whenever they happen. It represents a global network of international oil spill response expertise and resource centres to support response efforts.

IPIECA has published 19 good practice documents on oil spill preparedness and response, known as the Oil spill report series. These have become trusted reference manuals within and beyond the industry. The Oil spill report series provides a practical and accessible overview of the issues relevant to preparing for, and responding to, oil spills at sea. The Series represents industry consensus on good practice, and combines the expertise of the IPIECA membership, IMO and the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation. The reports cover the biological impacts of oil pollution on different types of habitats as well as contingency planning for, and response to, marine oil spills, including topics such as the use of dispersants, tiered preparedness and response, and sensitivity mapping.

IPIECA shares information and good practice, organizes meetings and workshops, and actively participates in key external events such as international oil spill response conferences and UN Forums, including the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee and Technical Forums.

THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The IMO/IPIECA partnership, the Global Initiative (GI) facilitates the reduction of global oil spill risk around the world by raising awareness and enhancing the state of preparedness and response to oil spill incidents. Since the 1996 launch of the GI significant progress have been made in the Caspian Sea, Black Sea and Central Eurasia, Mediterranean and West, Central and Southern Africa regions. The GI has initiated regional/national workshops, training courses and exercises that have encouraged better communication and cooperation between government and industry. It has resulted in increased ratification of oil spill related Conventions and improved contingency planning and response capabilities.

WHAT NEXT?
The oil and gas industry recognizes the challenges of the changing global oil spill risk profile. The industry is committed to continuous improvement to address these challenges. The industry will continue to work with intergovernmental, regional and national governments, and other partners to strengthen global oil spill prevention and preparedness.

The industry will focus on anticipating the problems that come from operating in remote and sensitive areas, and co-operate with other stakeholders to solve them.