

Thursday, 29 April, 2010

Swiss company blamed as oil continues to gush into sea

Swiss-based oil services company Transocean is being accused of negligence after a massive rig explosion off the U.S. coastline. The company, based in Zug, is being named alongside the well's owner BP, in a lawsuit on behalf of the family of one of the employees. Nine Transocean's staff and two other contractors are presumed to have been killed in the explosion eight days ago. Five separate investigations into the incident have already begun in the U.S. as an emergency response team works around the clock to try to contain the environmental impact of the spilling oil. Our Washington correspondent Daniel Ryntjes reports:



An estimated 42,000 gallons of oil is escaping each day from the deep water well, creating a slick which is at least 600 miles in circumference and growing.

Rear Admiral Mary Landrey is from the U.S. Coast Guard.

MARY LANDREY: "If we don't secure the well, yes, this could be one of the most significant oil spills in U.S. history. But we are working hard to secure that well."

Transocean, the world's largest offshore drilling contractor, is working with BP, which owns the well, to try to shut off the wellhead's main valve.

Guy Cantwell, the Director of Corporate Communications for Transocean, is not willing to attribute responsibility for the environmental damage at this stage.

GUY CANTWELL: "We are the rig company. We provide the rig to drill the well. We're paid a day rate."

DR: "Ok, so in other words, it would be more in BP's territory."

CANTWELL: "I don't want to comment on BP; I'll let them address that."

DR: "What you're saying is that within the contractual arrangements that you have, you would not be responsible for that aspect?"

CANTWELL: "I'm not going to talk about BP or anybody else in terms of responsibility. I can only address Transocean and that rig."

DR: "But you're saying Transocean wouldn't have responsibility for that aspect?"

CANTWELL: "Like I said, I'll let BP, I think you should ask them that question."

BP's Chief Executive Tony Hayward later gave an interview to the US TV network CNN.

TONY HAYWARD: "The responsibility for safety on the drilling rig is with Transocean. It is their rig, their equipment, their people, their systems, their safety processes."

BP and Transocean are now the subject of a lawsuit filed on behalf of the wife and son of one Transocean employee, Karl Kleppinger, who's presumed to have died during the main explosion.

Steve Gordon from the lawfirm Gordon, Elias and Seely, which is representing the family.

STEVE GORDON: "The first and foremost culpable party is Transocean. However, there are other maritime claims that are available to the injured parties."

Gordon says he's also preparing to name U.S. firm Halliburton in the suit, which he believes was responsible for a cementing process that carried out before the explosion and was designed to prevent a pressure build up.

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GORDON: "So far it does appear that the cement gave way and that the mud was coming up and therefore ultimately the mud turned into gas and that's what ignited the Deepwater Horizon."

Halliburton confirmed to World Radio Switzerland that they were involved in providing services to the rig, but wouldn't comment on specifics.

Gordon says he will be seeking more information from the companies, in order to firm up his own investigations.

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