

DRILLING AHEAD

Surface BOP ops in deepwater: where it's been, where it's going

Mike Killalea, Editor & Publisher

To surface stack or not to surface stack? That is the question—for deepwater operators and contractors, at least. Using surface stacks with floaters, pioneered by Unocal over the past 6 years in Southeast Asia, has demonstrated significant cost savings and efficiencies in mild marine environments. Many in the industry are looking at ways of drilling from floaters with surface stacks in seas somewhat less benign. The idea is not without its critics, though. One wary soul said it's like drilling without a BOP.

That appears decidedly a minority opinion, though, judging from those I've talked with. Some argue that surface-stack drilling is actually safer than using subsea equipment.

In brief, surface BOP drilling operations from moored floaters use a land or jack-up-type BOP suspended above the waterline in the moonpool area. The BOP is connected from casing shoe to surface wellhead to a high-pressure riser, typically a continuous length of 13 ³/₈-in. casing, serving as the conduit to the ocean floor.

Unocal, in its "SX" program, drilled something more than 150 wells this way in Southeast Asia, ultimately operating in water depths exceeding 6,500 ft. The operator was able to greatly extend the water-depth capability of the rig, a Sedco 600-series semisubmersible with a depth rating under conventional operations of just 1,500 ft. In SX operations, that same rig operated in water as deep as 6,722 ft. Unocal was able to slash well costs from an estimated \$5.2 million per "conventional" well to \$1.5 million per SX well in the first year in comparable water depths. Unocal shows incidence data that compares favorably with conventional operations, as well.

Bear in mind that the foregoing was accomplished in benign seas. It's likely that implementing surface stack operations to the Gulf of Mexico, with its noto-

rious eddy currents, or to West Africa or Brazil, will require a slightly different approach. **Transocean** has put significant effort into this.

IADC WORKSHOP

"Where surface stack has been and where it's going" could well be the theme of an upcoming IADC workshop. The 2002 IADC Surface BOP Workshop for Floating Drilling Operations seeks to educate the industry on the state of the art of surface BOP drilling from floaters and to provide an understanding of the risks and mitigation involved.

Organization of a dedicated IADC committee to develop guidelines for surface stack operations is a goal of the workshop, scheduled for 6 November at the Omni Houston Hotel Westside.

The **US Minerals Management Service** is a workshop sponsor, but this does not mean the agency endorses the technique. Rather, their interest is in working with the industry to examine surface stack operations from all angles, particularly the HSE side.

The morning agenda consists of a series of presentations on history, drivers and development, including equipment configuration. Subsequent sessions will address well construction (well design, seafloor isolation, risers), drilling vessels (operation, riser tension, mooring) and HSE (safety case, well control, planning and training). After lunch, the audience will break into concurrent sessions on well construction, drilling vessel upgrades and HSE.

Each session will develop a report to be presented to all, with time for Q&A. The day will wrap up with a panel discussion and organization of the IADC Surface BOP Work Group.

Complete details are available at www.iadc.org/conferences/SB2-program.htm. Hope to see you there! ■

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COVER

Rowan Drilling's recent newbuild Rig 51 is working for Newfield Exploration in Terrebonne Parish, La. A review of new land rigs begins on page 22. A review of rig automation equipment installed on some of those new land rigs begins on page 12.

**DRILLING
CONTRACTOR**



CAPITAL WIRELINES

US Int'l Trade Commission to study oilfield, drilling markets

Brian T Petty, Senior Vice President-Government Affairs

OILFIELD SERVICES STUDY (Washington/Geneva)—The US International Trade Commission (ITC) has announced a government-funded study of international markets for oilfield services, including drilling services. This examination was prompted by the Energy Services Coalition (ESC), a 60-member coalition co-chaired by IADC Senior Vice President-Government Affairs Brian T Petty seeking liberalization in energy services trade through the World Trade Organization (WTO) based in Geneva.

The formal request for the study was made by the United States Trade Representative (USTR), which is engaged in promoting the ESC agenda in ongoing negotiations at the WTO. The USTR will use this information in multilateral trade negotiations under the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to reduce foreign trade barriers to competition. The United States has identified energy services, and particularly oilfield services, as a critical service sector that would greatly benefit from trade liberalization. This investigation is a unique opportunity for the oilfield service industry to educate the ITC and the USTR about obstacles the industry faces in competing globally.

Individual energy and oilfield services companies have been understandably reluctant to publicly identify problems they have specifically experienced in countries where they operate, for fear of losing business there. So the USTR at the suggestion of ESC is using the resources of the ITC to conduct a broad study on a confidential basis to determine where problems exist, and which countries should be pressed to make their procurement processes transparent, their customs regimes consistent and non-arbitrary, and have their regulatory agencies treat foreign and domestic oilfield services companies equally.

The ITC set forth its goals thusly: "[to]

- (1) describe the various activities involved in the provision of oil and gas field services;
- (2) discuss the nature of trade in oil and gas field services; and
- (3) examine the extent of impediments to trade in oil and gas field services and the potential benefits of trade liberalization.

Since oil and gas field services are conducted in a vast number of countries, the ITC will focus on issues that could be relevant multilaterally. For the purpose of this study, oil and gas field services are broadly defined to include evaluation and exploration activities; drilling activities; and well development and completion activities."

ITC staff will be contacting individual IADC members, and will travel to the US and perhaps foreign oilpatches to meet with companies on a confidential basis to gather information useful to strengthen USTR's arguments for energy services trade liberalization. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Mr Petty is coordinating closely with ITC staff to achieve a useful and reliable product. This study follows earlier studies by the ITC on the electric power and natural gas industries, both of which greatly assisted the US trade negotiating position. The ITC expects to issue its report to the USTR by 18 March, 2003.