



CLOSE WINDOW

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Bluenose help with Gulf cleanup

Firms provide imaging equipment, buoys

By BILL POWER Business Reporter

Nova Scotia know-how and equipment helped repair BP's ruptured Macondo well and continues to play a critical role in efforts to contain the huge oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Halifax-based Welaptega Marine was called to the Gulf to prepare critical 3D imaging in the weeks leading up to a successful capping of the well Thursday. Tracking buoys designed and built in Dartmouth by MetOcean Data Systems Ltd. are helping an army of technicians track oil slicks and protect the coast.

"We were uncomfortable talking about our role in this devastating situation until there was some progress," Anthony Hall of Welaptega said in an interview Friday.

BP announced the leak was plugged Thursday.

"We're more than proud our technology played some part in the effort to get this disaster under control," said Hall.

He said three engineers from the underwater 3D imaging company left Nova Scotia for the disaster area in June.

The high-performance underwater cameras and powerful 3D imaging systems that are Welaptega's forte were used in a multitude of ways on the floor of the Gulf in the vicinity of the ruptured well.

Cameras mounted on remotely operated submarines provided visuals of the damage and computer models of the topography of the area for various groups working with BP in the effort to cap the well. In some cases, the equipment came within metres of the actual rupture.

"Our team was feeding information to many others and at this point we're not exactly sure of the specifics of how the data was used. We know we provided them with very good dimensional information," said Hall.

He said the sophisticated underwater imaging equipment used by Welaptega was originally developed for use on land for the mining industry and is the most sophisticated available in the world for the offshore industry.

Although the well is capped, harmful oil slicks continue to threaten the Gulf.

More than 150 tracking buoys, called "drifters" and built in Dartmouth by MetOcean, are

helping the U.S. Coast Guard and a slew of contractors to monitor slicks and water temperature. The company's self-locating marker buoys that can be deployed by air are also helping in the containment effort.

"These buoys are designed to deploy quickly when there is an oil spill. They establish a satellite link almost immediately to provide vital information on water movement," Emily Daniel, marketing manager at MetOcean, said in an interview.

She said data communicated by the buoys allow the oil-spill responders to predict with some accuracy the direction the slick will drift.

"This allows the skimmers to focus their efforts in the right areas to try to keep the oil away from land and beaches," said Daniel.

MetOcean has connections to the military supply sector in Nova Scotia. It markets communication buoys around the world, mostly to the oil and gas sector, aquaculture and surveillance industries, oceanographic and meteorological research groups and the military.

Welaptega — Mi'kmaq for eagle eye — has operated in the oil field services sector since 1991, when it first did 3D imaging work at the Cohasset-Panuke oil fields off the coast of Nova Scotia. The company now operates around the world.

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