



Katrina & Rita: What went right— And where do we go from here?

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IN THE HYPE over Katrina, Rita and the price of oil, gas and petrol, the public is missing the whole story. Despite Katrina, Rita, and, for good measure, 2004's Ivan, not a single fatality nor serious injury occurred offshore as a consequence of these horrific storms. In view of the calamity these storms visited upon the US Gulf Coast, this is an unsung industry achievement worth a healthy dose of applause.

Evacuation of a busy Gulf of Mexico comprising nearly 160 mobile offshore drilling rigs and thousands of production platforms is no mean feat. Drilling contractors and operators painstakingly develop detailed contingency plans for just such eventualities. Cleanly excising the hosts of E&P personnel offshore is an accomplishment too often taken for granted.

The second salient fact is that very little oil was spilled from offshore rigs, platforms or pipelines. Any that may have gone into the sea was engine fuel and the like. In a world obsessed by specters of petroleum-gushing rigs, this accomplishment deserves more praise than it has received.

Damage to rigs and platforms was non-trivial. There's no getting around this. Still, the good news is that, given the plethora of MODUs in the storm's path, that more were not sunk or set adrift throughout the Gulf.

For all the damage it caused, Hurricane Ivan was in part a blessing in disguise, prompting contractors to install GPS systems aboard MODUs. The GPS systems proved invaluable in tracking drifting rigs following Katrina and Rita.

The US Minerals Management Service has called for "no loose rigs" in the Gulf of Mexico. It is a goal that industry is working toward. A Joint Industry Project sponsored by the Offshore Operators Committee on improving mooring materials and practices is about to kick off.

IADC WORKSHOP PLANNED

In May, IADC will convene a special one-day Mooring Workshop designed to examine mitigating potential mooring system failures, uncertainties in mooring design and

the potential to improve mooring reliability. A call for abstracts has been issued for this event. More information is on the web through a link at www.iadc.org.

IADC Drilling Gulf of Mexico (30 Nov-1 Dec, Houston) will feature a special panel on mooring issues. In addition, speakers representing industry and government will present their perspectives on related topics (www.iadc.org/conferences/GM5_Program.htm). Drilling Gulf of Mexico is sponsored by **Noble Corporation** and endorsed by the American Association of Drilling Engineers.

WAKE-UP CALL?

The Katrina/Rita twins represent a public wake-up call on the long-ignored issue of energy security and economics. Even the most sleepy-eyed observer will have observed that high concentrations along the Gulf Coast of hydrocarbon producing and refining capacity represents an underbelly vulnerable to seasonal disaster.

The time is now to diversify energy sources and processing centers. Tremendous reserve potential for oil and gas exist along the US East and West Coast, Eastern Gulf of Mexico and within western states, not to mention ANWR.

Rational government policy need not be a political oxymoron. The public can discern between sincere concerns and political grandstanding. Adversarial regulatory relations is not helpful in ensuring reliable energy supplies.

Expanded exploration and development should stand at the core of a comprehensive energy policy that can also include nuclear, clean coal, hybrids and alternative fuels.

Is our hurricane experience of the last two years a freak of nature, the start of a new, frenetic cycle of more and stronger hurricanes, or the product of global warming accelerating storm formation? Nobody knows. Storms will come and go. But demand is surging to Category 5 proportions. Enlightened policy and hard work can respond, but time is running out.

Failure is not an option. ■