



THE BUREAU OF SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT
Office of Public Affairs

FACT SHEET: Shell Chukchi Sea Oil Spill Response Plan

On Friday, February 17, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) issued an approval of Shell Gulf of Mexico, Inc.'s Oil Spill Response Plan (OSRP) for the Chukchi Sea. This decision follows the bureau's thorough review of the plan and consultations with federal and state partner agencies involved in Arctic oil spill response. Shell has proposed drilling up to six wells in the Chukchi Sea during the next two summer open water seasons within the Burger Prospect, located about 70 miles off the coast in approximately 140 feet of water.

The approval issued today does not authorize Shell to begin drilling in the Chukchi Sea; Shell must still obtain approval from BSEE for well-specific drilling permits prior to commencing drilling operations.

BSEE's approval follows months of comprehensive internal, public and interagency review, including the involvement of the Interagency Working Group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska, chaired by Department of the Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes. For information on the federal government's preparedness and response coordination efforts, go to: <http://www.bsee.gov/BSEE-Newsroom/BSEE-Fact-Sheet/Arctic-Fact-Sheet.aspx>.

The OSRP accounts for the remote drill site and Arctic environment in the event of an oil spill during drilling operations. Shell plans to stage a full suite of response assets near the offshore drill site for immediate response, while also having additional equipment available for quick delivery in the event of larger spills.

Shell was required to substantially rewrite previously approved Arctic spill response plans to ensure that it was clear how they could mobilize and sustain a massive response over an extended period of time. Among other changes and more stringent requirements, BSEE required Shell to:

- Prepare for a worst case discharge nearly five times that of their previous plan, and in adverse weather conditions;
- Graph the trajectory of the potential worst case discharge over a 30-day period, as opposed to the 3-day graph in their previous plan; and

- Provide additional detail on the logistics of bringing equipment in from outside the region.

In addition, Shell has committed to provide for the following emergency contingencies: (1) the availability of a capping stack to shut off any flow of oil if other shut-off systems fail; (2) the capability to capture and collect oil from that stack; and (3) access to a rig capable of drilling a relief well that could kill the well, if necessary. The ready availability of a capping stack and an oil collection system are new commitments that apply lessons learned from the *Deepwater Horizon* tragedy.

In 2011, BSEE received a revision from Shell of their previous OSRP for the Chukchi Sea. In addition to and concurrent with BSEE's internal review of the OSRP, three other federal agencies within the interagency working group – the Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – provided comments to BSEE based upon their own reviews of the plan. Those comments were discussed extensively among technical experts at BSEE and each of the other three agencies, and with Shell, and formed the basis for a number of changes in Shell's OSRP.

Before drilling in the Chukchi Sea, Shell must submit to BSEE applications for permits to drill for each proposed well. Each application is analyzed based upon the unique characteristics of the proposed well and must fully comply with rigorous post-*Deepwater Horizon* safety and environmental standards, including those relating to well design and the operator's ability to respond in the unlikely event of a blowout and worst-case discharge, including the availability of a capping and containment system. Shell has proposed a well control containment capability that consists of a combination of a subsea capping stack, and surface separation equipment that will be located on a newly-built containment vessel.

Although Shell's OSRP addresses icy conditions as required by BSEE, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management has already taken steps to minimize the risk of an oil spill and clean up in icy conditions in its approval of Shell's Exploration Plan. Given current technology and weather forecasting capabilities, the approval requires that Shell cease drilling into zones capable of flowing liquid hydrocarbons 38 days before potential ice encroachment over the drill site. The 38-day period would also provide a window for the drilling of a relief well, should one be required. More information is available: <http://www.boem.gov/BOEM-Newsroom/Press-Releases/2011/press12162011.aspx>.

A copy of Shell's OSRP for the Chukchi Sea is available at: <http://www.bsee.gov/OSRP/Shell-Chukchi-OSRP.aspx>.

A copy of the Chukchi Sea OSRP approval letter sent by BSEE to Shell is available at: <http://www.bsee.gov/OSRP/Chukchi-Sea-OSRP-Letter.aspx>.

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