

China Says ConocoPhillips Oil Spills Spell Negligence

Manufacturing.net

BEIJING (AP) -- Chinese authorities said Friday that negligence by a ConocoPhillips subsidiary caused recent oil spills in Bohai Bay that have drawn intense criticism from marine authorities and environmentalists.

The State Oceanic Administration said in a statement on its website that an investigation found there were shortcomings in ConocoPhillips China's systems and management and that the company failed to take necessary preventive measures after signs of a problem emerged. The oil spills began in June in Penglai 19-3, China's largest oil field.

These factors led "to a major oceanic oil spill pollution accident occurring due to negligence," the statement said.

ConocoPhillips China operates the Penglai 19-3 oil field with state-owned partner China National Offshore Oil Corp.

Houston-based ConocoPhillips said Friday that it is making improvements to its procedures to improve the safety of its operations and prevent recurrences.

"ConocoPhillips sincerely regrets these unfortunate incidents," said John McLemore, a ConocoPhillips spokesman, in an email to The Associated Press. "We have fully cooperated throughout the extensive and thorough investigation and have learned very important lessons."

ConocoPhillips had also said in September that it would set up two funds to pay compensation and address environmental problems resulting from the spills.

The government has already ordered the company to stop all production pending a full cleanup and review to ensure no more oil seeps into the sea.

The administration said Friday that the oil spill covered 2,400 square miles (6200 sq. kilometers) of water surface. It said that the company violated requirements that had been laid out in an environmental impact assessment report reducing the ability to respond to emergencies, causing oil spill from one side.

It was not immediately clear what measures the government would take, or the response it expected from ConocoPhillips, but the Oceanic Administration has said it plans to pursue legal action over the spills, including losses to regional fisheries.

China's maritime authorities contend that ConocoPhillips failed to meet an Aug. 31 deadline for permanently staunching and cleaning up the spills. The company says

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it met the deadline and has contended that any oil still seeping from the wells, which have been sealed, is residual from the earlier spills, which released about 700 barrels of oil and 2,500 barrels of mineral oil-based drilling mud -- used as a lubricant for drilling.

Environmental experts say measures to cut back on effluent from factories and mining and to expand sewage treatment have failed to keep pace with the fast expansion of industries and oil drilling in the Bohai Bay, leading to the decimation of seafood and fish stocks and frequent red tides.

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