

Three BP Employees to Be Arraigned in Oil Spill Probe

MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Two BP rig supervisors and a former BP executive were scheduled to be arraigned Wednesday on criminal charges stemming from the deadly Deepwater Horizon rig explosion and the company's response to the massive 2010 spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

BP well site leaders Robert Kaluza and Donald Vidrine were indicted this month on manslaughter charges in the death of 11 rig workers. The federal indictment accuses them of disregarding abnormal high-pressure readings that should have been glaring indications of trouble just before the blowout of BP's Macondo well.

Former BP executive David Rainey was charged separately with concealing information from Congress about the amount of oil that was leaking from the well.

Their defense attorneys have vowed to fight the charges.

The hearing comes a day after a BP lawyer entered a not-guilty plea for the company as it was arraigned on related criminal charges. The plea Tuesday in federal court was a procedural move paving the way for the company to plead guilty at a later date.

BP announced earlier this month that it will plead guilty to manslaughter, obstruction of Congress and other charges and pay a record \$4.5 billion in penalties to resolve a Justice Department probe of the disaster.

Attorneys for BP and the Justice Department are scheduled to meet Dec. 11 with a federal judge to discuss a date for pleading guilty.

The Deepwater Horizon oil rig, owned by Transocean Ltd. but operated on behalf of BP, was drilling in the Gulf of Mexico about 50 miles southeast of the Louisiana coast the night of April 20, 2010, when it was rocked by an explosion. The rig burned for about 36 hours before sinking to the Gulf bottom a mile below the surface.

The bodies of 11 workers were never recovered.

The blast led to the nation's worst offshore oil disaster as millions of gallons of crude oil spewed from BP's well.

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