BP Ready for Trial in Deepwater Horizon Case

DANICA KIRKA,Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — BP acknowledged Tuesday it had failed to reach a settlement in advance of next week's civil trial on the Deepwater Horizon accident and is ready to defend itself vigorously against allegations of gross negligence in the U.S.'s biggest environmental disaster.

Rupert Bondy, the group's general counsel, said in a statement that settlement demands were "not based on reality or the merits of the case." The company said it was confident and ready to move to trial.

"Gross negligence is a very high bar that BP believes cannot be met in this case," Bondy said. "This was a tragic accident, resulting from multiple causes and involving multiple parties. We firmly believe we were not grossly negligent."

Billions are at stake in the Feb. 25 trial in New Orleans to determine BP's civil liability. BP already agreed to a $4.5 billion settlement of federal criminal charges and has set aside billions more to pay fines and damages resulting from the spill.

The trial is designed to identify the causes of BP's well blowout in the disaster that killed 11 workers. The first part of the trial also will proportion blame among BP and its partners in the ill-fated project.

U.S. government investigations blamed the 2010 spill on cost-cutting and time-saving decisions made by BP and its partners. Some 200 million gallons of oil spilled, much of it ending up in the Gulf of Mexico and the shoreline of several states.

During a recent conference call connected to the release of company earnings, BP's Chief Executive Officer Bob Dudley declined to answer questions from analysts as to whether a settlement was possible ahead of the civil claims trial. Instead he simply said that the oil and gas giant was "in the chute to get ready for trial."

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