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Friday, July 20, 2007

Ohmsett - National Oil Spill Response Test Facility – Marks Milestone

15 Years of Controlled Oil Spill Testing and Research

WASHINGTON – Ohmsett --The National Oil Spill Response Test Facility, is celebrating 15 years of service to the nation under the management of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS). Dedicated by MMS on July 22, 1992, Ohmsett is the only facility in the world where full-scale oil spill response equipment testing, research, and training is conducted in a marine environment – with various oil types, under controlled environmental conditions, such as waves of varied heights, salinity and temperature.

“The unique testing facilities at Ohmsett are essential in developing the technology and procedures required to effectively respond to future oil spills,” said Matthew Quinney, MMS Contracting Officer's Representative for Ohmsett.

Located an hour south of New York City on Naval Weapons Station Earle, in Leonardo, NJ, Ohmsett's mission is to increase oil spill response capability and efficiency through independent and objective performance testing of equipment, providing realistic training of response personnel and improving response techniques through research and development.

At the heart of Ohmsett is a large outdoor above ground test tank, which is 667 feet long, 65 feet wide and 11 feet deep and filled with 2.6 million gallons of crystal clear salt water. Included are a wave generator capable of producing different wave types, a fully equipped machine shop and chemistry laboratory and a new 50-seat training facility. Spanning the tank are three moveable bridges that are used to tow full-sized response equipment through the water at speeds up to 6.5 knots to simulate actual deployment at sea.

Ohmsett has been used to evaluate mechanical oil spill clean up equipment such as oil containment booms and skimmers, temporary storage devices, remote sensing instrumentation, chemical treating agents and dispersants, sorbents and fire-resistant booms.

It is estimated that Ohmsett provided 95 percent of the quantitative performance data on mechanical equipment used by industry, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Navy. MMS

uses data to develop strict regulations for its oversight of oil and gas development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).

Ohmsett was originally constructed and operated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from 1973 until it was closed in 1988. The U.S. Navy acquired Ohmsett in March of 1989 just a few months before the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska. The Exxon Valdez spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil into the ocean – one of the largest oil spills in U.S. history. The event prompted renewed interest in responding to oil spills, and within a year the Oil Pollution Control Act of 1990 was signed into law.

That same year, Ohmsett was formally mandated for use as a testing facility under the control of MMS. With additional financial support from the U.S. Coast Guard and Environment Canada, MMS began a two-year restoration project for Ohmsett, and dedicated the facility in July of 1992.

“Ohmsett is an international asset where government, private industry and academia can conduct oil spill research and development programs,” said Joseph Mullin, MMS Program Manager for Oil Spill Response Research. “Ohmsett test results contribute to improving state-of-the-art oil spill response equipment.”

Ohmsett creates oil spills in a safe environment. Without the facility, experiments would have to be conducted in the open ocean, which is expensive and impossible to conduct in the U.S. due to permitting restrictions.

The testing capabilities of Ohmsett have been upgraded to provide a controlled environment for cold water testing and training. This capability allows the facility to remain operational year round. Large tank experiments conducted at Ohmsett provide a critical link between laboratory scale and at-sea experiments because they can simulate real-world conditions without the cost of a field program.

Ohmsett is major component of MMS’s Oil Spill Response Research program. The focus of the program is to improve the knowledge, technologies and procedures used for the detection, containment and cleanup of oil spills that may occur on the OCS.

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