

How crisis management differs locally than abroad?



As the Gulf of Mexico oil leak continues to dominate headlines, Egypt experienced its own oil-related ecological threat, however, its source remained undercover

By Ahmed Morsy

As a result of the spill, oil floated to the shore of Egyptian Red Sea, the government said it had yet to discover the source of the pollution and may reduce the number of rigs operating in the nearby Gulf of Suez. However, later the Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum announced that the crude was leaked by a passing tanker or may have seeped from the ground due to a heat wave, but was not from any of its rigs.

Egypt's Ministry of Petroleum announced in a statement that by reducing the number of oil rigs in the Gulf of Suez it might be able to monitor those that remain more effectively. Besides, the Egyptian Minister of Petroleum Eng. Sameh Fahmy has called for the establishment of a fund to fight pollution, the ministry said.

Moreover, the Ministry's report included that all offshore oil platforms in the Red Sea are "sound," according to the state-run Middle East News Agency. Oil from the rigs was compared with samples from the sea but the investigators "cannot say for sure" whether the samples matched.

Petroleum companies, government agencies and local authorities tried hard to clean up the "limited" spill and four ships were sent to the waters near Hurghada, a tourist hub, to prevent any more crude from reaching the beaches. However, there is a big difference between how we treated with the spill of oil here in Egypt and there in the Gulf of Mexico regardless the amount of oil leaked.

Locally, the authorities do their best not to embarrass the source or the company behind the oil leaked or even our abilities and capabilities are the reason behind why we couldn't

have covered the actor. While on the other hand, it has been a long season of embarrassment for BP.

BP continues to work cooperatively with the guidance and approval of the National Incident Commander and the leadership and direction of federal government including the Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, Federal Science Team, Bureau of Ocean Energy, Management, Regulation and Enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard and secretaries Ken Salazar and Steven Chu. Hence, it's BP who is responsible for the amending and also any financial issues. The cost of the response to date amounts to approximately \$3.95 billion, including the cost of the spill response, containment, relief well drilling, grants to the Gulf states, claims paid, and federal costs. On June 16, BP announced an agreed package of measures, including the creation of a \$20 billion fund to satisfy certain obligations arising from the oil and gas spill. It is too early to quantify other potential costs and liabilities associated with the incident.

And The Obama administration suspended deepwater drilling after a blown-out well owned by BP caused a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The initial moratorium, issued in late May and barring new drilling below 500 feet (152 metres) for six months, was put on hold after U.S. District Judge Martin Feldman found the order too broad, arbitrary and inadequately justified.

The Obama administration is only responsible for discussing how to prevent any other crisis to occur. It has defended the need for suspending deepwater drilling so that officials have time to investigate the cause of the BP disaster, issue new safety regulations and improve oversight.

The Interior Department is-

sued the new moratorium on July 12. It barred drilling through Nov. 30 on new wells that use subsea or surface blowout preventers similar to the one used on the BP well. The administration said the suspension could be lifted once drillers provide more evidence of their ability to prevent a blowout and respond adequately should another deepwater catastrophe occur, and detail what assets are available to contain a second spill should it occur.

Conversely, in Egypt, the Petroleum Ministry and local authorities made themselves busy with how to get rid of the oil spill which till the moment has no owner.

Environmental activists and private tourism companies say they are mystified by the government's inability to find the source of the spilled oil. Amr Ali, Managing Director of the Hurghada Environmental and Conservation Association, a non-governmental organization, said his group videotaped oil in the waters surrounding a drilling platform in the northern Red Sea run by Petrogulf Misr, a state-run company formerly known as Geisum Oil Co.

In fact, Petrogulf Misr Oil Company is the main suspect in the case despite the statements of the ministry, the company already has the closet offshore platform to the Hurghada shore. Petrogulf Misr was a joint partnership between the ministry of Oil and Kuwaiti International Investment group which is selling its share in the company.

"Environmental requirements are obligatory to all companies operating both in the offshore and onshore as any of the companies can't work without taking the approval from the Ministry of Environment to maintain the natural reserves. Besides, each petroleum company has the factors of QHSE which necessitate maintaining the environment and not to leak any oil spill," Eng.

Mohammed Al Shabrawy Drilling General Manager of Belayim Petroleum Company (Petrobel), told Egypt Oil and Gas.

"The oil spill in the Red Sea may be from shipping which extends along the Red Sea as it is possible that one of the vessels leaked a certain amount of barrels due to poor storage," Al Shabrawy added.

He also highlighted that the oil spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico caused the sensitivity of such situation for fear of repeating this in Egypt. In addition, the analysis which is similar to the DNA analysis for the spot of oil did not decisively prove who is responsible for the oil spill, which brings us back to the safety measures in order to avoid such problem in the future, according to Shabrawy.

The ministry gave four possible explanations for the spill in its statement. The oil could have leaked from an offshore rig or a tanker passing in the Gulf of Suez, 10 kilometres from Hurghada, it said, or a leak may have been caused by an attempted sabotage of rig equipment. The crude could have also erupted from rocks on one of the islands off the coast due to high temperatures, it said.

Maybe it is matter of trust, maybe it is the fact that the Ministries of Oil and Environment do not really react to the size of the environmental and economic disaster this spill regardless of how small it is has caused. We are speaking about a very sensitive eco-system, we are speaking about hundreds of reservations are cancelled whether locally and internationally.

We do not have to wait till having a real catastrophe like Gulf of Mexico, this spill regardless from ship or from platform is like a wakeup call, we should have some proactive system for any similar incident.

"Everything will return to normal in a very short period," the state-

ment of the Petroleum Ministry said last month, without giving further details on the impact of the spill or its origin.

Egypt has been developing its eastern coastline to encourage tourism, which earned the country \$15.4 billion last year and is its biggest source of foreign exchange revenue, according to the Tourism Ministry. More than 180 rigs also operate in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez, according to the oil ministry, although production from the area has declined in the past decade.

"There should be training from the oil and gas companies to the engineers and labours working in the offshore platforms so as to repair leaks without problems that would have a bad impact on the environment," Eng. Hamdy Abul Naga, a petroleum advisor, told Egypt Oil and Gas.

Abul Naga emphasized that it is difficult to determine the source of the oil spill but by a high-level quality analyzing.

He also required that there should be "A specific criteria for how to deal with oil spill at the beginning, which called act rapidly in order to avoid this problem in the future."

Such crisis has to be dealt with as a wakeup call in order to be aware of how to prevent or even to deal with it in the future. Nevertheless, it's not the first of its time in Egypt as in 2008 an oil slick was discovered floating on the River Nile on 14 July near the districts of Manial and Helwan, resulting in highly polluting the water and causing three water refineries to suspend operations. At least, the spill, which covered an area of two kilometres, had an owner as it was spotted at different locations due to a leak in the main pipeline of the Helwan Cement Company (HCC).

