

More revelations point to criminality of BP, Transocean

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New revelations continue to emerge demonstrating the criminal negligence of BP and rig owner and operator Transocean in the lead-up to the April 20 explosion on the Deepwater Horizon.

Douglas Harold Brown, the top mechanic and acting engineer on the Deepwater Horizon, told the House Judiciary Committee this week that downsizing by Transocean had contributed to a breakdown of basic safety measures. “Because of the cuts in the number of engine room personnel, we were often days, weeks and even months behind in completing the necessary preventative maintenance requirements,” Brown said in prepared testimony.

Brown confirmed accounts from other survivors that in the immediate aftermath of the explosion workers were not allowed to contact their families, but were instead interrogated. “I was then immediately taken to a room and interrogated by two lawyers from Transocean in front of a court reporter,” said Brown, who was suffering from leg injuries at the time.

Stephen Stone, a general laborer on the rig, said that Transocean officials forced him to take a drug test and asked him to sign a waiver forfeiting his right to sue in exchange for \$5,000. “I never would have expected for my company to treat me like a criminal after I had survived such a disaster by making me submit to a drug test, and they try to tempt or trick me into giving up my legal rights by signing forms without a lawyer present,” Stone said.

The testimony confirms a *World Socialist Web Site* report, based on interviews with survivors, published on May 6. (See “Deepwater Horizon survivors told to take drug test before being allowed to call families”)

Meanwhile, in joint hearings held this week by the Minerals Management Services (MMS) and the Coast Guard, a safety official for BP admitted that drilling

operations were 43 days behind schedule on the Deepwater Horizon. With Transocean charging \$533,000 per day for use of the rig, this represented a cost overrun for BP of about \$23 million. This corroborates a mass of testimony suggesting cost concerns drove BP to skip past normal steps and ignore safety concerns in capping the well.

Brown, the same mechanic who gave testimony to the House Committee, told the joint MMS-Coast Guard hearings that BP’s “top man” on the rig overruled drilling bosses from Transocean in determining to proceed with replacing heavy mud in the rig’s riser prior to capping it.

“I recall a skirmish between the company man, the OIM [offshore installation manager], the tool-pusher and the driller,” Brown said. “The driller was outlining what would be taking place, whereupon the company man stood up and said, ‘No, we’ll be having some changes to that.’ It had to do with displacing the riser for later on. The OIM, tool-pusher and driller disagreed with that, but the company man said, ‘Well, this is how it’s gonna be,’ and the tool-pusher, driller and OIM reluctantly agreed.”

A BP official on the rig at the time of the explosion, Robert Kaluza, used his Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate himself and refused to provide testimony to the hearings, which are being held in Louisiana.

A lengthy *Wall Street Journal* analysis published Thursday, and based on internal BP and Transocean documents, reveals other ways in which BP sped along the well-capping process. Among other decisions, BP expedited a procedure involving drilling fluid that is normally used to detect gas in a well and passed over a usual quality test of the durability of cement around the rig’s riser. It did so in spite of warnings from cement contractor Halliburton, which had said the rig risked “a

SEVERE gas flow problem.” Many of BP’s decisions to speed up or bypass usual steps in the capping process were approved by the MMS, according to the report.

“We were behind schedule already,” rig technician Tyrone Benton said. Managers “hoped we’d be finished by that Friday.... But it seemed like they were pushing to finish it before Friday.... They were doing too many jobs at one time.”

The *Journal* also learned that BP’s manager was a novice who, in his own words, was aboard the rig “to learn about deep water.”

Also on Thursday, a *New York Times* report based on information from congressional investigators found that several days before the explosion BP chose to use a more economical pipe casing for the well “that the company knew was the riskier of two options.” The option not taken would have provided two barriers against deadly gases from the well.

The *Wall Street Journal*’s examination of the disaster has revealed a situation dominated by chaos and a breakdown in the chain of command in the immediate aftermath of the explosion.

An account published in the *Journal* Thursday quotes Andrea Fleytas, 23, who helped operate the Deepwater Horizon’s navigation machinery. She was the first to make a Mayday call after noticing that no one in command had issued a distress call. In the ensuing chaos, Ms. Fleytas jumped overboard and was one of 115 people eventually rescued by the Bankston, a nearby vessel.

Oil rig worker Carlos Ramos told the *Journal*, “The scene was very chaotic. People were in a state of panic.” As flames shot out of the well hole up to 250 feet, and debris was falling, injured workers were strewn around the deck.

“People were just coming out of nowhere and just trying to get on the lifeboats,” Ramos said. In the confusion, workers began jumping directly into the sea—a 75-foot drop into the dark water.

These latest revelations add to testimony given to the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Wednesday, which revealed that in spite of major warnings of a pending disaster even in the hours and minutes leading up to the explosion, the decision was taken to proceed, and no extra precautions were taken to protect rig workers. (See “BP had prior warning of Deepwater Horizon blowout”)



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