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Oil platforms: Commission convenes second safety talks with industry

Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger and Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik will meet representatives of oil and gas companies and national surveillance authorities on 14 July 2010. The aim of the meetings is to discuss whether EU legislation should be reviewed in the light of the accident in the Gulf of Mexico.

Günther Oettinger, Commissioner responsible for Energy said: "No regulatory regime alone can give us 100% guarantees of safety. Much depends also on the attitude and practices of operators and on having an operational system available. I wish to make sure that the necessary legislation is in place and effectively implemented and that, at the same time, all possible efforts are made by the industry to avoid a similar accident and consequent oil spill. Politics and business need to work together to ensure that the European environment and the public are as safe as they possibly can be."

This is already the second meeting Commissioner Oettinger convenes with major oil and gas companies operating in Europe. In a very first meeting on 11 May 2010, the Commissioner had asked the representatives to fill out a questionnaire of 12 questions, indicating the preventative measures they have in place. The answers will be delivered before the second meeting, allowing a very concrete discussion to take place.

The Commission is currently analysing the existing EU and national legislation and will complete its assessment on this basis. Depending on the results, Commissioner Oettinger will come out with new legislative and policy proposals this autumn.

Background

EU legislation provides the framework for safety of operations as well as environmental protection both in general and in case of an accident. Oil platforms are regulated under the Directive (94/9/EC) on "equipment and protective systems intended for use in potentially explosive atmospheres". It sets minimum industrial safety standards. The control of the platforms falls within the competence of national authorities. Workers on oil platforms are protected under the Framework Directive for health and safety of workers (89/391/EEC) which applies to all sectors. As on and offshore drilling of oil is a high-risk sector, the EU also adopted specific legislation (Directive 92/91/EC). It contains detailed minimum health and safety provisions, in particular from fire and explosions, escape facilities and alarms systems.

In case of accidents offshore drilling operations are subject to the relevant EU environmental legislation, including directives on environmental impact assessment, habitats & wild birds' directives, environmental liability, and the Water Framework directive for coastal waters. While the responsibility lies with the affected coastal state, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) supports the pollution response actions. EMSA has a fleet of oil recovery vessels under contract in the different EU seas, which can be mobilised on request under the Civil Protection Mechanism of the EU.