



DEC NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEC completes investigation of unreported North Slope spills

March 25, 2005--The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has completed its investigation of a complaint it received that BP Exploration-Alaska (BPXA) had failed to report spills from one of its North Slope drilling operations.

DEC's investigation found that on July 31, 2003 and December 5, 2004, the Nabors Alaska Drilling Rig 9ES experienced an event referred to as wellbore breathing, resulting in the release of approximately 294 gallons of drill muds confined within the walls of the drill rig. The releases did not present an imminent or substantial danger to the environment.

"The state and BP have agreed that certain low risk spills will be reported based on the quantity released so that problems can be assessed as they occur and corrective actions can be taken to prevent future spills," said Leslie Pearson, program manager for DEC's prevention and emergency response program.

In March 2003, BPXA and DEC entered into a Compliance Reporting Agreement that requires BPXA to report the release of low risk substances including drilling muds to low sensitivity receiving environments, such as gravel pads. The agreement includes a requirement to report the release of drilling muds in excess of 55 gallons, even when there is no release to the environment. The reporting requirement is intended to alert both BP and the state so that steps can be taken to prevent future occurrences.

DEC's investigation confirmed that no one from BPXA or their drilling contractor reported the release of drilling muds within the drill rig as a result of the wellbore breathing events. Based on its investigation, DEC will pursue appropriate corrective actions to ensure BPXA timely reports future releases of low risk substances within a drill rig.

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“It’s important for BPXA to notify DEC even when they have a release that is confined to the drill rig with little if any harm to the environment,” said Pearson. “When we know about these minor events we can work with BPXA to learn what went wrong and prevent more serious spills from happening.”

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The investigation report and agreement are available at:
www.state.ak.us/dec/spar/perp/index.htm