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Platts Energy Podium: U.S. Offshore Oil Safety Center Aims to Certify Drilling Contractors

PR Newswire
WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The industry-led Center for Offshore Safety is working to extend to drilling contractors its safety audit function for U.S. deepwater operators, the organization's chairman, Charlie Williams, said Tuesday at a Platts Energy Podium.

The center, which has contractors such as Transocean, Halliburton and Noble on its 22-member board, is seeking to better coordinate the internal safety management programs of contractors with operators even as federal regulators place greater scrutiny on contractor performance.

Williams said during his first news conference since taking his new position that the center aims to help streamline the complicated process of bridging workplace safety programs between operators and the several contractors that might work on an individual well.

One way to do that is to provide a way for contractors to become certified by the center so that individual operators don't have to repeat the process of verifying their contractors have adequate workplace safety programs, Williams said.

"We know the importance of contractor management and working on safety together with your contractors," Williams said. "Since each operator has to certify their contractors, we'd like to have a system where we can have a certification for contractors that's really the same for all contractors and we can have a common audit process and certify them."

Williams said operators will still have to work with contractors individually to coordinate safety on rigs. And while a common certification process is not required by regulations, going beyond current federal requirements is part of what the center is looking at.

"It does seem like it would be better for each of us to not have to go and individually certify these contractors," he said.

Williams also said the Safety and Environmental Systems (SEMS) regulation recently adopted by U.S. offshore regulators can serve as a model for more goal-oriented regulation going forward.

The U.S. currently uses a prescriptive model, laying out specific requirements for each phase of the exploration and production process. But the SEMS rule establishes broad goals and allows individual companies to determine how they will meet those goals - similar to the "safety case" model used in the United Kingdom and other places.

"We think there's an opportunity to move toward more goal-based regulation," he said.

Williams said the center has held a series of workshops for companies and is in the process of hiring a full-time staff. The center should hire an executive director within the next month or so, he said.

The center was created by the American Petroleum Institute to promote safety in the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It was a response to a call by the National Oil Spill Commission for an industry-led safety effort.

A recording of the Williams session is available via podcast at this link: http://platts.com/PodcastsDetail/EnergyPodium/energypodium/. You may be asked to complete a one-time-only cost-free Platts website log-in if you haven't filled one out previously.

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CONTACT: Kathleen Tanzy, +1-212-904-2860, Kathleen_tanzy@platts.com, or Elizabeth Catalano, +1-212-904-4937; In Asia: Casey Yew, +65 653 06552

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