

THE ADNOC 1999 OIL SPILL EXERCISE

“EXERCISE GHAZAL – PAJ Stockpile: The Maintenance Contractors Perspective”

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As maintenance contractors for the P.A.J. for the U.A.E. based stockpile our involvement with Exercise Ghazal began at an early stage through the planning meetings that took place throughout the year prior to the exercise.

Ed has already discussed the ‘Ghazal’ and the organisations involved and more importantly the aims targeted by ADNOC from which to measure the success of the day and lessons learnt for future response.

For Lamnalco, from the perspective of maintenance contractors and previous respondents to the ‘Pontoon 300 spill’, ‘Exercise Ghazal’ presented us with an opportunity to achieve the following aims:

- I. Promotion of awareness of the P.A.J. and the Stockpile in Abu Dhabi.
- II. Increase awareness of the borrowing procedure and intentions of the stockpile.
- III. Testing the logistics for mobilisation of the stockpile.
- IV. Integration of personnel amongst the many organisations present.
- V. To assess the oil spill response structure present in the U.A.E. today.

I & II. – Awareness

Aims I & II are long term targets that we continue to pursue in order for the stockpiles to be fully utilised. Maximum awareness must be raised within the organisations who will be involved in responding to future spills – for this, Exercise Ghazal was a perfect window of opportunity.

Many companies in the U.A.E have previously been unaware of the nature of P.A.J's contribution to the response capability available in the area. Indeed during the recent spill 'Al Jaziya 1' – a small tanker designed for European inlets carrying 800 tons of fuel oil, one individual from the responding organisation thought that they may have to pay for the use of the stockpile! This mistake was quickly corrected by another member of their organisation, meaning that the awareness of the stockpile is spreading and will continue to do so.

Through the public deployment of equipment during 'Ghazal' and 'Al Jaziya 1' individuals have become far more aware of The P.A.J. and the assistance that the stockpile provides in cases of emergency. Press coverage has provided an even broader medium from which to inform the populace as a whole.

Overall in the last 24 months the stockpile presence has been acknowledged and utilised by far more organisations than ever before – this is primarily due to exercises such as 'Ghazal' and the subsequent spill, 'Al Jaziya 1' keeping the stockpile in the minds of those who most respond to an emergency should it occur.

III. – Mobilisation Logistics

As we are all aware mobilisation times are critical when a spill occurs – oil dispersant only has a relatively small window of effectiveness in which to work; the earlier that booms are deployed the greater the possible protection to key areas ie. especially desalination plants in the Middle East.

Therefore every opportunity in which to test the logistics of mobilisation and deployment of the stockpile is eagerly anticipated. As maintenance contractors we do occasionally get asked by the responding organisations to mobilise the stockpile on their behalf. As such it is important to ensure that a reliable logistical infrastructure is in place in order to react at anytime, this means setting in place agreements with local transport companies for twenty four hour cover and also to ensure that in the case of the Abu Dhabi Oil

Company (ADOC), who store the equipment, that we can liaise with them to access the the stockpile in the shortest time possible.

Although in the case of 'Exercise Ghazal' we were unable to test the true reliability of this, as the stockpile was onsite the day before. The awareness that the logistical network has to work and that these systems must be in place for such an eventuality is a success in itself.

As a result of the exercise, communications and links between ourselves, ADOC and our logistical support companies have been improved. We are now able to mobilise trailers to the equipment in Abu Dhabi within an hour and craneage is available at the majority of ports within the U.A.E. in approximately two hours resulting in a brief mobilisation time.

Ultimately by improving these timings we can create a bigger window for response. This means that Booms can be deployed more quickly and inlets protected; further leakages contained; recovery of oil at an earlier stage offshore in order to prevent greater shoreline damage.

Although these all require other links in the logistical chain to work efficiently by improving the response of our own part we can provide greater flexibility to any response in the U.A.E. and thus increase the effectiveness of the stockpile.

VI. – Personnel Integration and Team work

Apart from the elements themselves, humans are probably the greatest variable that take part in any response. Variables in the sense that each individual will react differently to each situation they are presented with, this is greatly magnified in the case of a country similar to the U.A.E. where nationalities, cultures and languages are all mixed together throughout every organisation and thus any oil spill response operation.

During Exercise Ghazal nationalities working alongside each other in the deployment of equipment included, Japanese, British, Indian, Pakistani, Filipino and GCC nationals.

Therefore one of the problems that would face any response in the UAE was also present during 'Exercise Ghazal' as team members from OSRL, PAJ, Lamnalco and ADNOC had to mesh together to give a successful real time deployment and offshore response.

Overall we did find there were a few hiccups and although it did take a while for everybody to get used to the differences in language, tasks were successfully assigned and carried out. Due consideration was given during the exercise to the difference in English conversational levels between the operators. Whereas at the beginning of the exercise operators from each organisation stuck together, as the day went on these groups disbanded so that each task carried out had a complete mix of personnel. Ultimately the deployment of the equipment came first and difference in language second – to the benefit of the response.

As a member of OSRL commented they had never worked with PAJ operators previously and were so impressed that they wondered whether PAJ had any spare overalls that they could take back to Southampton with them as momentos!

Overall from the perspective of the maintenance contractors and as participants we felt that "Ghazal" has helped us tremendously in reaching those targets previously discussed. This is particularly apparent when we refer to the oil spill caused by the sinking of the vessel 'Al Jaziya 1' on the 24th of January this year.

I believe that as a result of Exercise Ghazal the response operation to the 'Al Jaziya 1' spill was able to draw on those lessons learnt the previous October. PAJ Hi-sprint booms were successfully deployed, integration and co-operation between Lamnalco and ADNOC personnel was highly productive with many of the same respondents working during the actual spill as during the exercise.

Although the “Al Jaziyal” was a minor incident compared with the “Pontoon 300” spill of January 1998, it had occurred offshore of Abu Dhabi, the capital city of the U.A.E., which has several critical areas including sea water intakes for power stations, an oil refinery and tourist beaches all in a short stretch of coast line.

The real test for what had been learnt during Ghazal had arrived, and more importantly as a result of this the response had been put in place in order to deal with such a spill.

Overall the response was seen as successful, even though bad weather continually hindered the operation, the salvors were able to recover the residual cargo on board and tow the vessel back to port. The oil that had beached was attacked as soon as it hit the shoreline by municipal workers, and use of dispersant and deployment of equipment was carried out with little hiccup.

In the future this kind of response can only occur through continued training and exercise and awareness. Hopefully ‘Exercise Ghazal’ has begun the snowball effect that we would all like to see throughout the U.A.E. with regard to oil spill response. In addition with the imminent arrival of the national contingency plan and its response bases around the Emirates, we may hopefully work towards and see a response similar to that occurring in Abu Dhabi in those poorer Emirates in the North of the country.