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Dean Breaches Campeche

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By Rach, Nina M

Rigs and platforms in US and Mexican waters successfully weathered a **Category 5** hurricane in late August. Hurricane Dean, the **first** of the season, caused preemptive evacuation of some platforms in the Gulf of **Mexico** and total evacuation of all facilities in Mexico's Bay of Campeche. When the hurricane season **opened** in the Gulf of Mexico this summer, a record **number** of rigs were drilling in US waters 5,000 ft deep or more. In mid-August, Randall Luthi, director of the US Department of Interior's Minerals **Management Service**, said 15 rigs were actively drilling in deep water. Deepwater oil production facilities include Anadarko's Independence Hub semisubmersible in 8,000 ft of water and Shell and BP's Na Kika semisub in 6,340 ft of water. But US Gulf of Mexico operations have escaped the wrath of the early season weather. Tropical Storm Erin caught the industry's attention in August, spurring evacuations of some offshore personnel (OGJ, Aug. 27, 2007, p. 84). But the storm blew through quickly, making landfall in South Texas and then meandering north.

Dean developed more slowly, keeping drilling contractors and operators on alert. It was listed as a tropical depression on Aug. 13-14, with wind speeds of 30-35 mph, and reached hurricane Category 4 status by Aug. 18. Dean took a direct westward path along the south coast of Jamaica and crossed the southern gulf; its winds reached 140 mph with gusts up to 169 mph-Category-5-just before crossing the Yucatan Peninsula on Aug. 21.

Mexican rigs

Petroleos Mexicanos had 43 rigs working off Mexico at the time of the August storms, including 29 jack ups, 11 platform rigs, 2 semisubs, and 1 inland barge. The majority were operated by Pride International Inc. (13), Nabors Offshore Corp. (9), Noble Corp. (8), and Perforadora Central (4). Others were managed by Diamond Offshore, Dolphin AS, Hercules Offshore, KCA Deutag, Parker Drilling, Pemex, and Perforadora Mexico.

By Aug. 21, Dean was a Category 5 hurricane, and Noble held a briefing at the **company's** Sugar Land, Tex. headquarters. Noble's eight jack ups were working primarily in Cantarell oil field in the Bay of Campeche.

Mark Burns, Noble's vice-president and division manager of Noble Drilling (US) Inc., said the company has global positioning system (GPS) units on all its semisubs and jack ups.

Noble uses two web-based tools to monitor storms in real time: ImpactWeather and RigStat. RigStat records data every 5 sec, and Noble gets updates every 15 min, viewable on weather and mooring dashboards.

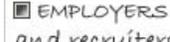
Noble and Pemex had evacuated about 685 company workers, contractors, and third-party personnel from the rigs in advance of the storm. All told, Pemex evacuated more than 14,000 people and shut in 2.65 million b/d oil and 2.63 bcf/d of gas. Pemex has not had an extensive shutdown since Hurricane Roxanne in October 1995.

Aftermath

Crossing the Yucatan Peninsula tamed Hurricane Dean, which entered the Bay of Campeche as a Category 1-2 hurricane with wind speeds less than 100 mph.

Companies began repopulating offshore rigs and platforms in the US Gulf of Mexico. By Aug. 25 Noble had restaffed five jack ups in the US gulf, and by Aug. 26 it had repopulated the eight rigs in the Bay of Campeche. On Aug. 28, the company announced that the rigs in Mexico had not been damaged in the storm.

Pride evacuated its Mexico-based jack ups and platform rigs before the storm and announced on Aug. 27 that it had reboarded start-up crews, found no damage, and expected to resume operations that week.

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Noble's Burns said the overall cost of Erin and Dean to the operators would take a while to quantify, but figuring the cost of evacuations was simpler. There are 500-550 helicopters operating in the Gulf of Mexico. About half of them are single-engine models, capable of carrying 4-6 people. Burns said Noble generally does not use single-engine aircraft. The other helicopters are twin-engine units, but only 20 of these are Noble's preferred Sikorsky S92 model, which carries 18 people. Twin-engine helicopters lease for about \$40,000/day

Burns estimated that the gulf evacuation, using all available helicopters, required at least 3 days at a minimum cost of \$3-5 million. Add to this the additional transportation and housing expenses, lost time on projects, and a few weeks of rig day rates, and the overall cost is tens of millions of dollars (and even more pesos).

Nina M. Rach

Drilling Editor

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