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New Technologies to Overcome Arctic Challenges

Recovering spilled oil in icy waters will take on a new look in the continuing effort to protect the marine environment.

The reason: The nation's largest oil spill research facility will now be open year-round so that industry and federal agencies can test equipment specifically designed to operate in Arctic waters. In short, the facility can now replicate broken ice conditions.

Located in Leonardo, New Jersey, The National Oil Spill Response Test Facility (OHMSETT) recently demonstrated a new piece of equipment, much like a hay bale conveyor, that will grab and lift large pieces of ice. This will make it possible for the skimmer located under a conveyor to recover oil from the water.

"The prototype skimmer was originally tested in a small indoor tank in Germany and then in Prudhoe Bay with encouraging results," said Joseph Mullin, project manager at the site. "But this is the first test in an outdoor tank with oil in broken ice." Mullin is an oceanographer with the Minerals Management Service, which oversees operations at OHMSETT.

If a spill were to occur in sea-ice conditions, it would be difficult to recover oil with existing booms and skimmers.

The MMS has been instrumental in the effort to develop technologies for recovering oil in ice infested waters. The agency has upgraded the testing capabilities at the New Jersey facility to provide a controlled environment for cold water testing and training.

The current project is a multi-national research effort that involves American, Norwegian, Canadian and German researchers.

MMS is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf in federal offshore waters.

The agency also collects, accounts for and disburses mineral revenues from federal and Indian leases. These revenues totaled nearly \$10 billion in 2001 and close to \$120 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Annually, nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

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MMS Internet website address: <http://www.mms.gov>