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BOEMRE Releases Report of Investigation into Fire on Mariner Energy's Vermilion 380 A Platform

WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) today released the findings of its investigation into a fire that occurred Sept. 2, 2010, on Mariner Energy Inc.'s, Vermilion 380 A oil and natural gas production platform located approximately 102 miles off the coast of Louisiana.

A BOEMRE Accident Investigation Panel concluded that the fire was caused by the collapse of a fire tube located inside of the platform's Heater-Treater. The Heater-Treater, a nearly 30-year-old piece of equipment, used heat from a fire tube as well as chemicals and electricity to separate oily water emulsions into oil and water. The fire tube had been weakened over time due to a variety of factors, including heat, corrosion and pitting. Investigators also found that after the platform lost primary power because of the fire, the emergency generator failed to start and supply power to the firewater pump, leaving the 13-member crew without a firewater system to aid them in trying to fight the fire. Ultimately, the crew was forced to evacuate the platform, and all were later transported to safety.

"This report reflects a careful and comprehensive investigation by the BOEMRE Accident Investigation Panel, led by the Investigations and Review Unit," said BOEMRE Director Michael R. Bromwich. "The report underscores the need for offshore operators to maintain their equipment consistent with existing standards, to protect the safety of personnel working onboard and to protect the environment."

The investigation included interviews of the Vermilion 380 A crew, review of documentary and physical evidence, examination of equipment onboard the platform, and consultation with an expert in oil production platforms and Heater-Treaters.

In addition to its investigative findings, the BOEMRE panel recommended several Incidents of Non-Compliance be issued to Mariner Energy, Inc., which may be used as the basis for future civil penalties. BOEMRE will now consider the panel's recommendations before taking further action in this case. Production from the platform remains shut-in until BOEMRE personnel approve all safety and structural corrections.

BOEMRE has issued a safety alert to oil and gas operators to address the findings of the investigation. Safety Alerts are tools used by BOEMRE to inform the offshore oil and gas industry of the circumstances surrounding an accident. They also contain recommendations that help to prevent the recurrence of such an incident. To view the safety alert, go to: <http://www.boemre.gov/safetyalerts/9.htm>.

The full report can be viewed at:
http://www.boemre.gov/ooc/pdfs/Panel_VR380AMAY23FullReport.pdf.

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