

PRESS RELEASE

**OHMSETT CONDUCTS FIRST EVER FULL-SCALE
DISPERSANT TEST**

LEONARDO, NJ (March 26, 2001) – Ohmsett, the National Oil Spill Response Test Facility, recently announced it has conducted the first ever full-scale evaluation of a new dispersant application system in its test basin. The test was the first of its kind using full-scale equipment, a variety of real oils, dispersant chemicals, and simulated, at-sea wave conditions. Ohmsett representatives are available to discuss their newly enhanced testing capabilities for the first time at the International Oil Spill Conference in Tampa March 26 through March 29.

The Ohmsett staff began looking into providing dispersant and related equipment testing after realizing the significant and positive effects chemical treating agents can have on oil spill cleanups. As dispersant chemicals are applied to oil spills, they break the oil down into smaller droplets, which naturally biodegrade into the water column and reduce the threat of shoreline impact.

However, testing of dispersant effectiveness has proven difficult. For example, ocean field trials have been accomplished a few times with good results, but such testing is expensive, difficult to control, and only valid for the narrow range of sea conditions at the time of the test. Lab tests can be conducted as well, but they also have their limitations as they provide poor simulations of the scale and mixing processes that occur at sea.

“Ohmsett’s test basin is the ideal way to test dispersants and dispersant application devices,” says James Lane, U.S. Minerals Management Service Technical Representative for Ohmsett. “We’re the only facility in the world where full-scale oil spill response equipment testing, research and training can be conducted with oil in a simulated marine environment. Ocean variables such as wave height can easily be controlled, while the cost of testing is significantly lower than actual ocean testing.”

Ohmsett’s first dispersant test, funded by ExxonMobil Research and Engineering Company, was a successful evaluation of a new dispersant application system developed by Spiltec and Elastec American Marine. In the test, dispersant was applied “neat” (or undiluted) to the oil spill. Using the sweep system technique, a single pass application of 10 feet actually covered swaths of several hundred feet.

“Everyone was pleased with the results from the testing at Ohmsett,” says Lane. “We were not only able to test specific conditions to examine particular features of the application device, but we were able to determine that the system is an effective way to apply dispersants and maximize the efficiency of the chemicals.”

Before conducting its first dispersant testing, Ohmsett first needed to explore the feasibility of using chemical treating agents in the test tank. Ohmsett personnel, along with the help of SL Ross Environmental Research, Ltd., conducted a research study in the laboratory and at Ohmsett. They determined a number of dispersant tests can be done in sequence without concern that the concentration of dispersant in the tank is affecting the results. Additionally, they found relatively low concentrations of dispersant in the tank will not obscure underwater viewing of initial experiments, allowing videotaping of the results.

Ohmsett staff working with SL Ross have also developed a standard protocol for dispersant testing that should be accepted by the oil spill response community as the standard for realistic, mid-scale dispersant testing in the U.S. The protocol tests were performed to obtain benchmark data on how closely the dispersant test conducted at Ohmsett could reproduce the effectiveness results of similar tests in lab and ocean trials.

Ohmsett’s staff is proud of its new dispersant testing capabilities and they look forward to conducting more tests this fall and winter. Depending on client interest, the staff may also develop a dispersant training program at the tank that will make use of this unique facility.

Ohmsett is the only facility where full-scale oil spill response equipment testing, research, and training can be conducted with oil under controlled conditions including varying wave simulations. Ohmsett is located an hour south of New York City, in Leonardo, New Jersey, and is maintained and operated by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) through a contract with MAR, Incorporated.