

**Press Release  
For Immediate Release  
Friday, 2013 May 31**

Contact for information:

Dr. Bonny Schumaker Tele: 626-383-1412 Email: [GoMRCAC@gmail.com](mailto:GoMRCAC@gmail.com)

## **Gulf Coast citizens call for oil industry oversight council**

### **Oil industry declines invitation to meet**

---

Three years after the 2010 BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, citizen representatives from all five U.S. states on the Gulf of Mexico coast have decided to move forward with the establishment of a *Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (GoM RCAC)*. All principal Gulf of Mexico oil industry operators and associations were invited to join the citizen representatives at a planning meeting in New Orleans yesterday, and all declined.

Citing oil industry and government complacency as underlying causes of the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, citizen stakeholders are demanding a greater role in ensuring the highest possible safety standards in oil and gas operations in the region. In 2010, the *National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling* endorsed the establishment of a Gulf of Mexico RCAC, modeled after the highly successful RCAC formed in Prince William Sound, Alaska after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989 ([www.pwsrcac.org](http://www.pwsrcac.org)). Since then, despite repeated requests on behalf of Gulf citizens to mandate a GoM RCAC, U.S. Congress has taken no action.

“The GoM RCAC is not intended to chase RESTORE Act money or to address restoration from impacts of the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* disaster,” said Drew Landry, a native of Louisiana and one of the coordinators of this meeting. “Our goal is to learn from lessons of the past and prepare for the future.”

The citizen meeting held in New Orleans yesterday was the first to discuss specifics of the RCAC for this region, as a new paradigm for responsible business. The May 4, 2013 invitation sent to Gulf Coast oil operators stated the purpose of the meeting as follows:

*“To enhance collaboration among industry, government, and citizens that is truly effective for ensuring the safety and sustainability of the Gulf and its resources.”*

Industry invitees included BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Chevron, Marine Well Containment Company (who discussed the invitation with all of its members, which in addition to the companies above include Anadarko, Apache, BHP Billiton, Hess, and Statoil), American Petroleum Institute (API), U.S. Oil & Gas Association, Texas Oil and Gas Association, Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil & Gas Association (LMOGA), and the Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Organization (TIPRO).

In his May 24 letter declining the invitation, ConocoPhillips VP William Bullock wrote that:

*“We believe we have strong existing avenues to meet with stakeholders to understand their concerns and incorporate input into our business plans and actions, and participation in a GoM RCAC is not a fit for us at this time.”*

Gulf citizens at yesterday’s meeting strongly disagreed with this assessment, and they have vowed to step up their own efforts to form a GoM RCAC.

The GoM RCAC will include independent voting representation by all major citizen stakeholders across the Gulf Coast -- fishermen, tourism operators, women’s organizations, faith-based organizations, indigenous people, local governments, scientists, environmental groups, *etc.* It will be a mechanism for providing needed engagement, communication, outreach, and trust among all Gulf of Mexico oil industry, government, and citizen stakeholders who bear potential or actual significant impact from *present and future* industry operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

“We envision the Gulf of Mexico RCAC commissioning its own research and providing recommendations and information to government and industry on all aspects of oil operations in the Gulf of Mexico, including exploration, production, shipping, storage, transportation, spill prevention and response, and environmental monitoring,” said Dr. Bonny Schumaker, another of the coordinators for this meeting and a Gulf Coast resident whose nonprofit *OnWingsOfCare.org* has provided aerial monitoring in support of offshore and coastal ecology since 2010.

Drew Landry elaborated: “Our goal is to make it safer for those who work, live, and play in the Gulf. We’ll use lessons learned from the BP disaster together with independent science to make sound recommendations to industry and government, and we’ll provide training and equipment for impacted and capable citizens to help protect our lands and waters.”

Schumaker added: “A working RCAC benefits everyone -- it lowers the risk of future pollution incidents as well as costly future litigation, it improves future spill responses, and it builds trust and communication with local citizens.”

Delegates proposed a budget for the GoM RCAC of at least \$10 million per year, to be funded through the existing federal *Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund* (OSLTF), thus not directly costing Gulf of Mexico oil industry operators or taxpayers. The OSLTF currently has over \$2.7 billion from a nationwide 8-cent-per-barrel fee on oil.

“The Gulf citizens’ meeting yesterday was historic, and it’s a real shame the oil industry did not participate,” said Rick Steiner, a former University of Alaska professor who helped form the Alaska RCACs and who participated in the New Orleans meeting. “We can’t undo the damage from the *Deepwater Horizon*, but we can and must do everything possible to prevent and better prepare for future such disasters and other oil impacts.”

Regarding the fact that industry invitees all declined to attend the meeting, Ms. Jackie Antalan of Mobile, Alabama said, “Ignoring us won’t make us give up. The Gulf Coast needs this citizens’ advisory council. We’ve waited three years for Congress to act on the recommendation from the oil spill commission, and now we’ve decided to act on it ourselves. We’re thinking it through, we’ll propose agreements to industry and government representatives, and we’ll ask Congress to adopt legislation as they did for Alaska to mandate and support the council’s existence.”

Referring to the highly successful RCACs formed in Alaska after the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* spill, whose annual budget is over \$4 million per year, Ms. Kindra Anderson from Buras, Louisiana said, “Why should we accept less than Alaska received? We have more miles of vulnerable marsh and

coastline, we have more industry activity in the Gulf, and we carry far more risk. We have enormous resources to offer in order to protect our waters and coastline, and we need to have a say in things.”

The meeting concluded with strong commitments to continue the development of strategies for citizen involvement in addressing impacts to human health, fisheries, and the environment; in responding to future pollution incidents; and in advocating prompt Congressional legislation to establish and maintain the GoM RCAC.

Sharon and David Gauthé, who lead an interfaith organization in southeastern Louisiana, stated: “With an RCAC, we can feel assured that our next generation will have their voices heard.”

Representing fishermen and other citizens from Mississippi, Ms. Thao Vu spoke for all present when she stated, “Citizens here deserve greater empowerment and a legitimate voice in the safe management of the Gulf oil industry. A regional citizens’ advisory council (RCAC) is a constructive and reasonable way to accomplish this.”