

SUMMARY OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE MMS OCS-SC
SUBCOMMITTEE ON “MERCURY IN THE GULF OF MEXICO”

Date, Time, and Location of the Meeting: 23 April 2002, 6:00 pm, Holiday Inn,
Alexandria, VA.

Type of meeting: Closed Session with participation from selected invitees.

Committee Members Present: E. Creselius, L. Marshall and W. Schroeder* (Chair).
[Not in Attendance: D. Stephenson-Hawk]

Invited participants:

Other Scientific Committee Members: R. Diaz, M. Rex, and L. Shapiro.

MMS Personnel: M. Boatman, J. Cimato, C. Cowles, J. Kendall, F. Piltz,
D. Prentki, and P. Roscigno.

Others: P. Montagna, UTMSI, J. Neff, Battelle Ocean Sciences,
M. Parker, Exxon/Mobil, and J. Ray, Shell Global Solutions (US) Inc.

In attendance at the start of the meeting were the members of the subcommittee, the other MMS Scientific Committee members, and MMS personnel. The first item of business was a discussion of the responsibilities of the subcommittee. It was unanimously agreed that the only charge to the subcommittee was “to independently review and evaluate existing scientific information, and provide guidance on what actions the MMS should take regarding the issue of ‘Mercury in the Gulf of Mexico’ in the context of OCS oil and gas activities in the Gulf.”

The second item of business was a discussion of the current status of Phase 1 – ‘Information Gathering’ activities. The subcommittee members reported that they were in receipt of the material that MMS had distributed to date and that this information was providing essential background information. The subcommittee then requested that MMS continue to identify and distribute any and all pertinent material on the mercury issue; particularly information on any other governmental agency’s ongoing or planned activities to conduct reviews or research efforts that address any aspect of this issue. Next it was agreed that, if their schedules permitted, all members of the subcommittee should attend the “Mercury Forum” in Mobile, Alabama, on May 20-21, 2002. J. Kendall (MMS) stated that he was confident that funds would be made available to support this travel but that he could not confirm this until tomorrow (24 April).

At this point in the meeting, the two speakers who presented background talks on ‘Mercury in the Gulf of Mexico’ during the morning session of the regular OCS-SC meeting and two industry representatives were invited to join the meeting. The two speakers were asked to attend this meeting to answer any additional questions the subcommittee might have about their presentations. The two industry representatives were asked to attend to update the subcommittee on the status of the API sponsored review on ‘Mercury in the Marine Environment as it relates to offshore oil and gas

activities' and any other industry activities that might provide additional information on this subject. All four were also asked to attend to participate in identifying gaps in our understanding of mercury in the marine environment.

The industry representatives reported that the API report, authored by J. Neff, was currently under review/revision and that they were working to have it completed and released prior to the start of the "Mercury Forum" (May 20). The subcommittee was also informed that modifications to an existing MMS-Industry research project were being considered that could potentially yield insight into the levels of methylmercury present in bottom sediments in areas where drilling for oil and gas has occurred relative to levels of methylmercury in bottom sediments remote from drilling activities. Additional information on this activity will hopefully be available in the near future. An 'open floor' discussion then followed that touched on a broad spectrum of topics dealing with what is and is not understood about mercury in the marine environment.

At the conclusion of the 'open floor' discussion, the members of the subcommittee thanked all of the invited participants for attending and contributing to the meeting. The subcommittee then agreed (1) to continue in an information-gathering mode at least until after attending the 'Mercury Forum' and receiving the API report; (2) that the next phase [#2] will be to prudently review and evaluate all of the pertinent information; and (3) that it appears that the final phase (#3) of their work will be to formulate recommendations, based on the findings in Phase 2 – 'Review & Evaluate', for actions the MMS should pursue in order to fully comply with their responsibilities in the managing of mercury in the marine environment. The subcommittee also acknowledged the requested date of June 2002 for completion of their report and agreed that they will strive to meet that deadline.

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William W. Schroeder
Marine Science Program
The University of Alabama
Dauphin Island Sea Lab
101 Bienville Blvd.
Dauphin Island, AL 36528-4603

(V) 251-861-7528
(F) 251-861-7540
wschroeder@disl.org