A blow out with a venturi attached to bring the flames well above the well head

Emergency Response Planning in the Oilfield

Recently I was approached with the question, “What makes a good Emergency Response Plan and how is the plan utilized in the oilfield?” I had to ponder the question for some time.

In our business we deal with the Blowout Contingency Plan (BCP) which is supposed to be a subset of the bigger Emergency Response Plan (ERP). More often than not our BCP is a more comprehensive document because we deal with emergency situations for a living and have developed an extensive list of equipment, concepts and other incident management processes. We utilize an Incident Command System (ICS), by which we document and map the typical response process in such a manner as to make it fairly simple for the organization to understand and implement. Basically we describe how to help us do our job better, which as a result achieves the goal of getting the situation back under control.

The biggest advantage for us is we live and breathe emergency response, and we have pretty much seen it all. When we facilitate the development of an ERP or BCP for a company, it always amazes me how the company’s involvement can vary – from no involvement at all to completely changing a proven system to fit into the company’s model, and how proven concepts on incident management are challenged. Typically we will hear, “During normal operations we notify these individuals and conduct this procedure, and so we need to follow those protocols.” Hopefully emergency response operations are not “normal” for your organization, so adjustments have to be considered and recognized for a successful outcome.

Purpose
The object of an ERP is to establish a common framework for developing local response plans for
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however responders didn’t like it because there was no clear decision maker. In the oilfield or any emergency situation that can be major problem because time is critical.

Application
The framework established is applicable for a local ERP for the various operations carried out by a company.

Emergency response management system requirements
Adequate emergency response plans and procedures should be in place prior to commencement of operations, and should be in compliance with a company’s HSE Contingency and Emergency Planning requirements. This is another area of concern – companies requesting an ERP without providing sufficient time to develop the plan. We run into this quite a bit, “We are due to begin operations in 20 days and we need a response plan.” In the corporate world of development, reviews, revisions and final acceptance, it is difficult to develop these plans in the timeframe demanded. The larger issue is understanding the plan. If possible the plan is completed in time, then it is just sent to the field, without educating the end user and drilling crew to see if there are issues. This can prove disastrous and costly in terms of safety and economics.

More specifically, for each hazardous operation there should be an ERP in place that will provide guidelines for managing an emergency operation. It should contain:

- Initial (48 hr) response actions
- Guidelines for strategic control plans
- Guidelines for daily tactical action plans during emergency operations
- Critical response resource requirements and availability
- Issues that may adversely affect response and recovery

Ownership and control
The ERP should be a controlled document. It is owned by the company, who is responsible for its distribution and amendment.

ERP goals
The end goal of the ERP is to create a local guide to ensure, in the event of an emergency response incident, that an organized response for emergency is brought swiftly and efficiently into action.

The ERP should provide, as a minimum, a working methodology to safely and effectively manage the operations necessary to regain control of a situation under local conditions. This would include the initial response, covering the time from after evacuation until dedicated response teams are formed and response specialists have arrived on location, and managing the control of opera-
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The personnel (including deputies) who may be involved in the management of an emergency situation should be fully aware of their role. The efficiency of the ERP needs to be systematically tested and improved through periodic drills. This is the biggest shortcoming of most companies. Not enough drills are conducted to train and educate the end user of the document.

**Conclusion**

Although the oilfield is a different work environment the basic response strategies are the same. The Incident Command System needs to be utilized and needs to be communicated through training and drills. Communication needs to be considered and everyone needs to know who is in charge. The system needs to be uniform so no matter who picks up the plan they can understand. In essence the ERP for the oilfield is not any different than ERPs for other industries and should be constructed with the same considerations.
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