RESOURCE MAPPING AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING, PTP PIPELINE FACILITIES, PANAMA

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Abstract

The facilities of the PTP (Petro Terminal de Panama) consist of an 80-mile long, 36-inch pipeline and two marine terminals. The Pacific facility consists of three shore-based terminals to handle tankers from Valdez, Alaska. The Atlantic terminal contains two single-point moorings to load tankers destined for U.S. ports along the Gulf of Mexico.

Prior to the opening of the pipeline, the government of Panama contracted for a series of studies designed to better understand the shoreline sensitivity, marine resources, archaeology, and limnology along the pipeline route and adjacent to each terminal. Results of the shoreline sensitivity analysis indicate that, by far, the Atlantic terminal in the Laguna de Chiriqui is the most sensitive and likely to be damaged during a spill. The laguna has almost no tides, is relatively stagnant, and is dominated by mangroves (51 percent of the total shoreline). In contrast, the Pacific terminal contains much higher tides and currents and fewer mangroves [44 percent of the total shoreline, but less than 5 percent within 30 miles of the terminal].

In response to environmental concerns and greatly supported and advised by the pipeline user companies, PTP completed a workable spill-response plan, developed along three fronts: the active and continuing purchase of spill-response equipment for use at the marine facilities as well as in fast-moving streams; the creation of specially trained spill-response teams; and the delegation of clear lines of authority for both land and marine spills. The interrelated roles played by Panamanians, the people of PTP, and the pipeline user companies provide an example of how different groups can cooperatively work together to protect the environment and still maintain financially advantageous, oil-related projects in a lesser-developed country.