



New ideas could fix poor public image, open promising acreage

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IT IS AN UPHILL BATTLE demonstrating that our industry is not an evil empire of J R Ewing cowboys and mendacious ENRONs. In case you were in doubt, a recent poll commissioned by the Texas Alliance of Energy Producers brings depressing news on that front.

The poll of 753 people in Houston and another 300 across Texas found that 40% believe that increases in gasoline prices were caused by greed among energy companies. Only 22% cited supply and demand, and 36% conflict in the Middle East.

And this is in Texas, mind you. What would be the results in California, the Netherlands (site of Greenpeace's world headquarters) or the UK (hopefully, excluding Aberdeen).

Furthermore, the survey found that more than half believe that our industry does not have enough regulation. I am hesitant to share this finding with my colleagues at IADC who labor tirelessly in the minefields of regulation, legislation and bureaucracy. A plug: Their sagas and activities are chronicled in this issue.

Another finding: Nearly 3 out of 4 Texans (72%) believe that the "oil and natural gas industry cleans up sites only because the government makes them."

IS PERCEPTION REALITY?

Clearly, we have a long way to go in righting our public image. And public image is a funny thing. "It doesn't matter what is true, it only matters what people believe is true.... You are what the media define you to be." That cynical observation is attributed the co-founder of Greenpeace.

Perception is reality, in other words. That's anathema to engineers, but unfortunately a stinging reality in the public forum.

Logic is our problem. It's axiomatic to our rational, engineer-dominated industry (I plead guilty!) that facts, figures and reason will triumph. But emotion trumps our splendid arguments. Hence our pitiful image, despite spending tens of millions on

remediating abandoned well sites, for example, or our enormous investments in QHSE worldwide.

ENVIRO-FRIENDLY DRILLING

Still, continuing our good works can only help. And here's a new one, that, properly publicized, could not only improve our Darth Vader image, but improve industry's chances of gaining access to areas with sensitive ecologies, yet burgeoning with E&P promise.

At the 3rd quarter 2005 meeting of the Drilling Engineering Association, **Tom Williams, Maurer Technology Inc** (a subsidiary of **Noble Corporation**), outlined a proposal for "Environmentally Friendly Drilling Systems" aimed at imposing low impact in environmentally sensitive areas (which seem to be practically everywhere these days).

In addition to Noble, participants include the US Department of Energy, Texas A&M University, **Anadarko Petroleum**, and the Houston Advanced Research Center. Mr Williams said the proposal has been warmly received by the Bureau of Land Management and the Park Service, who are eager to find solutions to the polarizing development/conservation dichotomy.

The objective, say organizers, is to integrate advanced, but of-the-shelf technologies into a drilling rig system with modest environmental impact. Work will build on Anadarko's minimum-footprint Arctic platform in Alaska. (See DRILLING CONTRACTOR, January/February 2005, page 28 for a summary.)

You can download Mr Williams' presentation from www.dea.main.com. Click on meetings and select the minutes for the third quarter.

We stand at a juncture of high energy demand, tight supplies and sensitive environmental issues. It's an opportunity to fix our image problem and serve ourselves while providing vital energy to the economy. It just takes innovative thinking. And we're great at that. ■