

COPEX 2010

The four-yearly gathering of the EU's oil pipeline experts



The 2010 CONCAWE Oil Pipeline Operators Experience Exchange seminar (COPEX 2010) took place in Brussels on 25–26 March, continuing a long-established tradition started in the 1980s. The COPEX seminar has been held on a four-yearly schedule since 1994, its purpose being to provide European oil pipeline operators with a forum to update their knowledge and exchange information on legislative, regulatory and technical developments. Although regulators are frequently invited to present their perspectives, most contributions are provided by the pipeline operators themselves, who also form the majority of the audience. COPEX 2010 was attended by some 85 participants from 14 countries, representing most of the oil pipeline operators in Europe.

The COPEX seminar is traditionally opened by a presentation of the latest results from CONCAWE's annual survey of the environmental performance of the EU's cross-country oil pipelines, which is based upon input from about 70 companies and agencies operating oil pipelines in Europe. These organizations are responsible for transporting around 800 million m³ of crude oil and refined products per year over 150 pipeline systems having a combined length of more than 34,000 km. CONCAWE's report¹ now covers 37 years of data from 1971 to 2007.

Following this introduction, the first session at COPEX 2010 was dedicated to relevant legislative and regulatory developments over the past four years. Although no specific pipeline legislation has been implemented at the EU level, many EU Directives and regulations have an impact on pipeline operations or will have an impact in the very near future.

Because the EU pipeline network was essentially built in the 1960s and 1970s, pipeline age and integrity are increasingly in focus and this provided a topical theme

for the second session of the seminar. Over the long term, safety statistics in the 'spillage report' do not suggest that older pipelines are more prone to incidents. In fact, the frequency of pipeline incidents related to corrosion and mechanical causes has decreased over the years. This is a testimony to the effectiveness of improved integrity management systems and increasingly sophisticated inspection techniques. However, continued vigilance is needed to ensure that these inspection and maintenance techniques are effectively applied. Data collected over the past few years suggest that the continuous downward trend in mechanical failure incidents has stabilized or perhaps reversed and this trend will be carefully monitored over the coming years.

The third session of COPEX 2010 covered a variety of current operational matters including: the development of a process safety benchmarking scheme in the UK; efforts to reduce damage to UK pipelines from third parties; experience with drag reducing additives in Spain and France; the introduction of FAME into the UK's multi-product pipelines; and experience with a sophisticated leak detection system in Hungary. The closing presentation considered contingency planning and the changing environment for pipeline operations.

COPEX 2010 underlined the fact that oil pipelines are an essential way to safely and efficiently transport crude oil and refined products across the EU. The integrity of the EU pipeline system is paramount in order to ensure a safe and reliable supply to refineries and customers. By bringing pipeline operators together to exchange learnings and best practices, COPEX contributes to pipeline integrity management and to continuous improvement in pipeline operations. CONCAWE is proud to be a partner in this very important activity.

The COPEX 2010 presentations can be found on the Events page at www.concawe.org.

¹ CONCAWE Report 10/09