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Overpressurized rocks threaten offshore drilling

Overpressurized rocks threaten every offshore drilling rig in Texas.

Dr. William R. Bryant, a marine geologist, and Dr. L. J. Thompson, a civil engineer, have been given \$50,000 by the U. S. Geological Survey to find a solution.

"Overpressurized sediments occur when the material being deposited on the ocean floor starts to consolidate and traps pockets of water," Thompson said. "As more sand and sediment is deposited the pressure on the entrapped water increases."

"Now when you drill into one of these high pressure zones it tries to blow the mud, drill stem, and everything else out the top of the oil rig," said. "These over pressures are common to oil companies at great depths."

"For example, from New Orleans to Corpus Christi, there are many such pockets at the 10,000 to 12,000 foot level," Thompson said. "Recently, there was a blowout as shallow as 3,000 feet."

"Not only that but overpressured sediments are unstable and subject to slides," he said. "An understanding of this phenomenon needs to be developed if the overpressured zones that constitute a hazard to

offshore structures are to be located.

"As a result, we've laid out a four-year program to attack this problem," Thompson said. "The first year a theory needs to be developed that will predict excess pore pressures for the steady state process. We've got to be able to predict where they will occur."

"The second year's task will be to develop equipment, like a probe, that will allow us to locate the high pressure zones," he said. "Also this technique might have possibilities as a mapping tool for shallow sediments. The probe will use the relationship between excess pore pressure with temperature, electrical

resistivity, sonic velocity and porosity.

"The third year will be spent constructing the probe and the demonstration of its use through mapping continental shelf areas where excess pore pressure might exist," Thompson said. "And, the final year will be spent locating and mapping the zones of high excess pore pressure."

The rest of the project staff consists of graduate students Phillip and Robert Chen. Dave Powley, from AMOCO Oil Company, will serve as an unpaid consultant on the project. He has examined over 4,000 well-records studying the deep problem.

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"QUALITY FIRST"

\$25,000 for alcohol study granted

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare has awarded more than \$25,000 to TAMU to study the effect of alcohol on the brain.

Dr. W. R. Klemm, project head, has made some interesting observations on drug rats. He found he could make them mentally alert while intoxicated.

By injecting a drug, physostigmine, into drunken rats, the cortical brain waves appear as those of extremely alert rats. Meanwhile, they physically bump into objects, fall off the edge of the table, and topple over.

Klemm hinted that this might be a first step on the way to developing an instant "sober-up" drug.

"This work reveals that ethanol caused motor problems more or less independently of cortical influence," Klemm said. The cortex of the brain is where thinking processes occur.

"To extrapolate this to normal drinking in the human is not clearly justified," he said. "However, such a relation would indicate that there is a brief phase of the intoxicated state when thinking is active."

"The fact that physical intoxication persists when a major part of the brain is protected by the drug against alcohol, indicates that alcohol acts on chemical processes in the brain in ways which have yet to be discovered," he said.

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