

# Justice Department sues SEDCO for negligence

United Press International  
HOUSTON — The U.S. Justice Department, saying SEDCO Inc. was negligent and incompetent in its work on the Mexican oil well that spewed 100 millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, Tuesday filed claims seeking \$6 million for cleanup and other damages.

The claims were phrased so that the federal government has the option of adding Pemargo, the Mexican drilling firm that operated the well, and Pemex, Mexico's government-owned oil monopoly, could also be sued for damages. Additional damages also can be requested if SEDCO is found negligent.

SEDCO supplied the Ixtoc I drilling platform that blew out in the Gulf of Mexico 600 miles south of the Texas coast

June 3, spouting more than 100 million gallons of oil unabated before it was largely brought under control last week. The runaway well is expected to be totally capped within a few days.

The Justice Department called offshore oil exploration "ultra-hazardous" and said SEDCO, an oil equipment leasing firm with land and offshore operations throughout the world that was founded by Gov. Bill Clements, should be responsible for the oil that washed onto Texas beaches during the height of the tourism season.

SEDCO's equipment on the Ixtoc I well was "unfit and unsuitable for its intended purpose," the claim said, and "those in charge of it were incompetent . . . (and) negligent in carrying out their responsibility."

After the blowout, it said, SEDCO neglected to stop or contain the oil discharge and failed to remove the oil from U.S. navigable waters, the 200-mile U.S. fishing zone or the Texas shoreline.

The Justice Department also filed a motion asking the court to allow the department to file a separate suit against SEDCO.

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The suit was filed 15 minutes before a 10 a.m. deadline set by U.S. District Judge Robert O'Connor Jr. SEDCO had asked that a deadline be set for filing of all claims.

The Justice Department had planned as late as Monday to file claims for hundreds

of millions of dollars against SEDCO as a result of the spill that occurred off Mexico's Yucatan coast and spread to the Gulf coast of Texas Aug. 9.

But after discussions with several federal agencies involved, including the Coast Guard and the Commerce Department, it was decided to seek less than \$10 million in damages and "other substantial damages to the property of the United States," sources said.

Administration officials said the decision gives them the maximum flexibility to increase their claims as prolonged litigation continues and the long-term effects of the oil spill can be better assessed.

Texas Attorney General Mark White last week filed a state suit asking \$10 million from SEDCO for damages for the oil

that stained Texas beaches during the peak of the tourist season.

Clements, who put his SEDCO holdings in a blind trust when he ran for governor, has contended the suit is politically motivated.

"I still think it's purely politically motivated," Clements said of the latest suit. "I'm glad to get another bird in the tree. Jimmy Carter has now joined (Democratic Party leader) Billy Goldberg, Attorney General Mark White, and (state AFL-CIO leader) Harry Hubbard. They're all three twirling the same song."

SEDCO already faces other claims totaling \$350 million.

While damage to the Texas shoreline so far has been less than anticipated, cost of

the environmental damage from the 18-week-old spill of a Mexican oil rig may not be fully known for years.

Fishermen, shrimpers and the Texas state government have filed \$350 million in claims against SEDCO and two Mexican companies that drilled and ran the well.

Whether SEDCO's deal with Pemargo or Pemex is a critical point in any lawsuit, because the United States is reluctant to consider a lawsuit against the Mexican government or its oil company.

Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo is refusing to help finance the massive cleanup, and his government quickly points to U.S. pollution of its territory from vast industrial wastes dumped over the years into the Mississippi River.

# THE BATTALION

Vol. 73 No. 38  
16 Pages

Wednesday, October 24, 1979  
College Station, Texas

USPS 045 360  
Phone 845-2611

## 2,000 share dinner at 'Bill Moore Day'

By RICHARD OLIVER

Battalion Staff  
The Bill Moore Day banquet was a hodgepodge of barbecue, political praises, Brazos County hierarchy and 1,700 cheering extras.

Although Sen. Moore of Bryan had expected 400-500 people, at least 2,000 showed up at the Brazos Center Tuesday night to give him their support.

The event, sponsored by the Friends of Bill Moore, included speeches by Texas A&M University President Jarvis Miller, A&M Chancellor Frank Hubert, A&M Consolidated Trustee Bill Fitch and Bryan-College Station Chamber of Commerce President Judy Rychlik. Lt. Governor Bill Hobby attended as well.

Moore was clearly happy with the large turnout.

"I'm pleased," he said. "I'd really only expected 400-500 people, so I'm sorry we don't have more seats. All of this was done without any advertising; we didn't publicize this at all."

Moore, who has served in the Texas Senate for almost 31 years, said he has no higher political ambitions.

"I would prefer to be where I am than in the governor's position," he said. "Being the dean of the Senate is a much better position. All the laws have to pass through us, anyway."

Moore agreed in part with Texas Gov. Bill Clements' statement that institutions of higher learning were a waste of the taxpayers' money.

Earlier in the week, Clements said learning institutions should "tighten their belts" like all other state agencies.

"I don't think the governor's statement was too off-base," he said. "When schools go out and recruit foreign students just to keep a head count, that's ridiculous. It costs the taxpayer in this state \$2,000 apiece just to keep them here."

Hobby, on the other hand, said he believed Clements had a bit to learn about Texas' higher education institutions.

"I think that as Gov. Clements gains more familiarity with public higher education in Texas, he'll reach a better understanding of it," he said. "He'll see the marvelous quality of the public higher education in the state."

"I think it's interesting that if you'll notice, Gov. Clements' line item vetoes appropriations were really primarily directed at higher education, including universities in Austin, Galveston and even A&M University here. I hope that as he has more exposure to higher education in Texas, some of these vetoes will be eliminated."

Moore also said he feels the biggest

problem the nation faces right now is inflation.

"The (U.S.) Congress must simply quit spending so much money," he said. "Cheap money drives prices up. We can't do it and sacrifice national defense, though."

Moore thinks Texas, on the other hand, is doing fine.

"Our state is in fine shape," he said. "We are in good shape financially. We have a 'pay-as-you-go' system. We can't spend money we don't have. Also, the whole state of Texas is in good shape politically."

Moore, in his speech, was confident of his political future as senator.

"I have no intention of quitting as long as my health is good and my wife will put up with me," he said. "I intend to go back and represent the state of Texas and this district to the best of my ability."

Bill Fitch, speaking earlier to the crowd, summed up Moore's tenure, saying, "He hasn't ever had but one job. He's either stuck in the mud or loyal as hell."



State Sen. Bill Moore, right, and Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby joke during Bill Moore Appreciation Day, an annual fund-raising dinner for the long-time Bryan legislator. About 2,000 people attended the dinner in the Brazos Center Tuesday.

Battalion photo by Lee Roy Leshper Jr.

## Cleaners begins accepting claims for items lost in Thursday fire

By DEBBIE NELSON

Battalion Staff  
University Cleaners started taking claims Monday morning for clothes burned in a fire that gutted the building last week, owner Bernie Gessner said Tuesday.

The business, at 211 N. Main St. in College Station, will take claims until Dec. 17 and pay them as quickly as possible, Gessner said. He said the 100-150 people who filed their claims Monday may have to wait three weeks to get reimbursed.

To claim reimbursement for his clothes, a customer needs to tell the cleaners his name, address, the day he brought the clothes in to be cleaned, how many garments were lost, and their approximate value. Claims should be filed with University Cleaners at FM 2818 and Southwood,

next to the Doux Chene apartment complex.

Gessner said the cleaners had insurance on its equipment, but not on the clothes. Rates on that kind of insurance are too high, he said, unless a cleaners is in a fire-proof building.

Authorities had first thought the fire was accidental, but investigators found the fire to be a result of burglary and arson, Gessner said. He said the fire marshal discovered that someone entered the cleaners through the back, took some change and a pistol, then set fire to the building.

Gessner said he is not obligated to pay customer's claims because the fire was not caused by negligence on his part.

However, Gessner said, he is paying all claims. He could give no estimate of the total value of clothes lost, but the overall

loss, excluding the cost of the building, is \$75,000-\$100,000.

Gessner said he expects most people to file claims for lost clothes within the next few weeks. Since 90 percent of the cleaners' records were saved — including those on the clothes — Gessner expects few false claims.

Depreciation of old clothes is the most severe problem anticipated, Gessner said.

For example, if someone claims a pair of 2-year-old pants cost \$35, he may receive only 40 percent (or \$21) because of the age of the pants.

Values are determined by the International Fabric Care Institute Fair Claims Guide, which is used nationally.

Gessner said he has received several claims that seem too high. Two students claimed to have lost brand-new \$400 suits

they had purchased for interviews. In cases like this, Gessner will try to find out where the garments were purchased, to assess the value.

"A lot of the lost clothes were purchased locally," Gessner said, "so they're fairly easy to substantiate."

There were 250-300 Corps of Cadets uniforms in the shop when it burned — fewer than usual, Gessner said. He said these claims are easily recovered, because the store writes up a list of the people who lost uniforms and gives it to the Military Property Custodian (MPC), which then reissues the uniforms.

Gessner he would be interested if the building's landlord wants to rebuild the cleaners. The fire code for new buildings (the old one was built in 1936) would require the cleaners to be built of completely non-flammable materials, which would be very expensive.



Sky's the limit

David Peter, a flagpole painter from Austin, scales the staff in front of Texas A&M University's Academic Building for its paint job, which is done every two years. Peter has been painting flagpoles for about seven years. Last week he painted the one in front of the Administration Building.

Battalion photo by Lynn Blanco

## Wind causes no automatic shutdown

# Ride's safety device may have failed

United Press International  
DALLAS — State Fair of Texas officials said Tuesday the tram ride that malfunctioned Sunday, killing one person and injuring 15, was not designed to shut down automatically if buffeted by high winds.

Wayne Gallagher, executive vice president and general manager of the fair, told a news conference the only emergency device to stop the ride is activated when a roller on a gondola leaves a cable.

He said investigators will examine the possibility the emergency device failed Sunday when one gondola — swaying in high winds on the half-mile cable route over the fair's midway — became jammed as it passed over a supporting post and three other cars slammed into it, dropping

two of the cars almost 100 feet down on top of tent booths on the crowded midway.

Gallagher said the tram ride — in operation since 1964 — was designed to operate in winds up to 36 mph but ride operators must use their judgment in stopping the ride when winds are high. Wind gusts up to 35 mph were reported Sunday.

Witnesses blamed those winds for the accident that killed Fred Millard, a 41-year-old Texas Instruments employee, who was hit by one of the falling gondolas. His wife and their two children and a dozen other persons were injured. Three of the injured remained hospitalized Tuesday.

Gallagher did not name the wind or any other factor as a cause of the accident. He said an extensive investigation was under

way but results may not be available for some time.

Scores of investigators converged on the almost quiet fairgrounds Monday, including local and federal government inspectors. Others were insurance adjusters, fair authorities and representatives of Von Roll Co., manufacturer of the ride.

By Monday afternoon, fair officials said, experts had completed visual and photographic inspections. They then began the slow process of removing all of the more than 40 gondola cars and inspecting them individually.

Meanwhile, an \$850,000 lawsuit was

filed late Monday against the State Fair and Von Roll, by an attorney representing one of those seriously injured in the accident, prompting a district judge to grant a temporary restraining order that directs fair officials not to destroy evidence.

Attorneys for the fair, Russell Smith and Jeff Lynch, attended the news conference Tuesday and advised Gallagher against commenting on any aspect of the suit.

Gallagher did say that the fair has insurance.

"There is insurance coverage — certainly by the contractor, certainly by the fair and maybe by others."

## Carter given authority to develop gas-ration plan

United Press International  
WASHINGTON — The House Tuesday passed and sent to the White House a bill allowing President Carter to develop a standby gasoline and diesel fuel rationing plan, but requiring the approval of Congress to actually implement it.

The bill, which passed the Senate

77-18 last Wednesday, was given final approval by the House, 301-112.

The legislation was worked out by a House-Senate conference committee between differing versions of the bill.

Despite months of wrangling and bitterness, the bill's final passage was relatively uneventful. Many Republicans, as well as Democrats, voted for it.