

## BP says report not about blame, then names names

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By Ayesha Rascoe

WASHINGTON, Sept 8 (Reuters) - "We were not about apportioning fault or blame," BP Plc's top safety official told reporters as the company released its internal investigation into the world's worst offshore oil spill.

But lawyers involved in oil spill lawsuits say the 193-page report into the deadly April 20 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico sets the stage for court battles between BP and its top contractors.

"The finger pointing has just begun," said Louisiana attorney Richard Arsenault, who has brought numerous lawsuits against BP and its partners.

The report sets out eight key findings, many of which are critical of work done by BP contractors Transocean Ltd and Halliburton Co.

Mark Bly, BP's vice president for safety and operations, began the media briefing in a downtown hotel ballroom by saying his team was focused on preventing any similar accident in the future rather than finding fault. "Our work may be used for those reasons, but that's not what we've done."

Although BP cited its own lapses in oversight of some rig operations, it specifically blamed rig operator Transocean at the briefing for failing to test the automatic shutoff system (AMF) on the Macondo well's blowout preventer (BOP).

"There was no indication that the AMF system was tested at surface prior to deployment of the BOP on the Macondo well," a member of BP's investigative team, Fereidoun Abbassian, told reporters.

Arsenault said the key to unraveling what he called the "blame game" will be following the contractual arrangements between the parties.

Daniel Becnel, a Reserve, Louisiana lawyer who filed has filed numerous lawsuits related to the spill, said BP, Transocean and their partners should have already admitted liability and worked out the percentage of blame between them.

"I would not get in to a court room and shoot each other. They're insane," Becnel said of the companies.

Transocean spokesman Lou Colasuonno said the blowout preventer was "inspected, tested and went through a rigorous maintenance schedule prior to being placed on the Macondo well and was then tested weekly, right up until 72 hours prior to the blast."

"Any statement to the contrary is false," he said.

Transocean also is conducting an internal probe of the blast. But it said it would not be finished until all the facts were in, including an inspection of the just-retrieved blowout preventer.

BP officials said oil services company Halliburton should have done more to test the cementing of the well and alerting BP to any problems.

Halliburton joined Transocean in rejecting BP's findings, saying the report contained "substantial omissions and inaccuracies."

(Reporting by Ayesha Rascoe; Additional reporting by Tom Hals in Wilmington, Delaware and Kristen Hays in Houston; Editing by Tim Dobbyn)