Getting along with Reporters, Environmentalists, and Regulators: How to Get Your Company's Message on the Air

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Oil and gas companies continue to get clobbered with expensive and punishing environmental regulations and drilling bans because they have done a poor job of convincing the public, the press, and the government that their operating practices are environmentally safe. The oil industry also continues to be perceived of as arrogant and secretive, which only aggravates its problems.

Smart operators must learn to balance profitable development with earth-friendliness. They also must learn to tell their story more effectively and openly, not just through big trade groups like the API and IPAA, but as individual small businessmen working to improve the economies and job bases of their local communities. That means being more forthcoming with next-door neighbors and environmental groups, befriending local and national reporters who cover their companies, and fine-tuning messages and communications skills.

Companies also can improve their images and, ideally, lighten their regulatory burdens by thinking of creative, win-win solutions to environmental problems their projects create. One company, for example, solved the problem of where to dump offshore channel dredging waste by creating a new island off South Texas with a carefully planted habitat that last year attracted a pair of endangered whooping cranes. State regulators loved it, it cost very little, and the press coverage was extremely positive.

Holocene Reef Development on the Belize Shelf

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Reconstructing the history of Holocene reef development requires an accurate measure of the local relative sea-level rise. In Belize, a C^{14}-based sea-level curve has been developed using mangrove peats as the sea-level datum. By combining this curve with the southward-sloping configuration of the pre-Holocene surface, it is possible to model the progressive flooding of the shelf in time slices and to superimpose the development history of the reefs.

In the southernmost parts of the lagoon, the antecedent underpinnings of the reefs were flooded by 10 ka, and aggradational reef growth started to develop about 8 ka. Since 8 ka, the average measured accretion rate for these reefs is less than 1 m/1,000 yr. This is more than two times slower than the calibrated sea level during that interval. These reefs fail to grow to sea level and are incipiently drowned. Accordingly, they are classified as "give-up" reefs.

The reef templates of the central shelf lagoon were flooded between 9 and 5 ka, and reef growth initiated between 8 and 3 ka. Measured accretion rates for these reefs range between 1.5 and 8 m/1,000 yr and reveal an extremely rapid accumulation profile as compared with the coeval sea-level history. The internal anatomy and upward-shallowing profile of these reefs indicate a "catch-up" style of growth.

The shallow, northernmost portions of the shelf lagoon were inundated by sea-level rise between 4 and 5 ka. The reefs of this area are the youngest in Belize, and they allow for the investigation of reef inception and development that is concomitant with the final, decelerating stages of Holocene sea-level rise. Measured vertical accretion rates of these reefs range between 1 and 3 m/1,000 yr. The internal facies of these shallow structures reveal a reefal history that tracks sea level characteristic of "keep-up" type reefs.

The southward sloping ramplike profile of the Belize lagoon provides examples of backstepping reef deposits that initiated and developed at various stages of the Holocene transgression. This study demonstrates that the rate of sea-level rise coupled with shelf position and depth controls the growth history of reefs. The most significant implication of this research details a direct causal relationship between sea-level history and reef drowning events in Belize.