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**NEW OCEAN EXPLORATION COMMAND CENTER INSTALLED AT STENNIS**

STENNIS SPACE CENTER, MS, April 19, 2012 -What mysteries lie in the depths of the Gulf of Mexico? The Gulf's hidden world is being revealed live and in high definition this April at Stennis Space Center, MS thanks to a long-standing partnership between Mississippi State University and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The new Mississippi State University Science and Technology Center at Stennis is now home to the only NOAA Exploration Command Center in the Southeast. An Exploration Command Center is a state-of-the-art communication hub that provides a two-way communication system that allows scientists on research vessels at sea to collaborate with scientists on shore as they all view live, high-definition video streams of secrets of the sea.

The Mississippi State University High Performance Computing Collaboratory and NOAA's National Coastal Data Development Center (a division of NOAA's National Oceanographic Data Center) provided technical support for the team effort that made this Exploration Command Center possible. The Northern Gulf Institute, a NOAA cooperative institute, is participating with NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research to coordinate the first use at Stennis of this cutting-edge technology as NOAA exploration flagship *Okeanos Explorer* explores the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico in April 2012.

"The Mississippi State University of Science and Technology Center at Stennis is the perfect place to house the new NOAA Exploration Command Center," said Dr. Steve Ashby, associate director of the Northern Gulf Institute. "Stennis is known for innovative research and collaboration among its agencies. We were able to set up the Exploration Command Center very quickly because Mississippi State and NOAA work well together here. This is a good example of the kind of cooperation that exists at Stennis."

The Exploration Command Center at Stennis is only the seventh in the United States. Development of NOAA Exploration Command Centers began in 2003 when NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration partnered with the Institute for Exploration to develop an operating model for scientists to

participate in ocean exploration through “telepresence technology.” This technology, now used in Exploration Command Centers and elsewhere, allows scientists aboard NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* and the Ocean Exploration Trust Vessel *Nautilus* to be in constant contact with shore-based scientists through a combination of high-definition cameras, remotely operated underwater vehicles and state-of-the-art networking including an Internet-enabled intercom system for real-time voice communication as the ship’s remotely operated vehicles send a continuous stream of live video and data.

“The key is that this method of communication offers a unique, real-time data exchange that enables the shipboard science party to ‘reach back’ to scientists on shore to take advantage of a broader range of expertise,” said Russell Beard, director of NOAA’s National Coastal Data Development Center.

Scientists from across the region are traveling to Stennis to participate in the current Gulf of Mexico expedition of NOAA’s exploration flagship, *Okeanos Explorer*. NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* is the only ship in the NOAA fleet with a built-in capability to use telepresence and has been providing live images from the seafloor over satellite and high-speed Internet pathways. Only scientists lucky enough to visit an Exploration Command Center such as the one at Stennis will be able to talk directly with the scientists on board *Okeanos Explorer* as this exciting exploration of the Gulf continues, though other scientists at other locations can also view live video and offer comments to the exploration team. The public can watch and hear the comments of scientists live as *Okeanos Explorer* explores the Gulf of Mexico depths by visiting <http://go.usa.gov/mr7>. This link is also optimized for mobile devices.

The *Okeanos Explorer* Program is the only federal program dedicated to systematic exploration of the planet’s largely unknown ocean. NOAA Ship *Okeanos Explorer* is operated, managed and maintained by NOAA’s Office of Marine and Aviation Operations which includes commissioned officers of the NOAA Corps and civilian wage mariners. NOAA’s Ocean Exploration and Research (OER) operates, manages and maintains the cutting-edge ocean exploration systems on the vessel and ashore including, the Institute for Exploration’s *Little Hercules* Remotely Operated Vehicle, OER Camera Sled *Seirios*, mapping system, telepresence capability, Exploration Command Centers ashore, and terrestrial high-speed communication networks.

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#### Media Notes:

- Email Russ Beard at [Russ.Beard@noaa.gov](mailto:Russ.Beard@noaa.gov) or Angela Sallis at [Angela.Sallis@noaa](mailto:Angela.Sallis@noaa) to schedule photo opportunities. You may also call 228-688-2936.
- The *Okeanos Explorer* will be exploring the Gulf of Mexico April 19-29, 2012. Scientists will be at Stennis Space Center using the new Exploration Command Center to communicate with the ship at a variety of times during this expedition.