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## OTC is drawing tens of thousands to town

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James Nielsen Chronicle

Robert Colbert wipes down a pipe rack display for an automatic drilling rig at the Drilmec Drilling Technologies booth.

Attendees at this year's annual Offshore Technology Conference are navigating harsher waters in their industry than when they last convened.

Oil is around \$50 a barrel, down from triple digits last May, as a storm-tossed economy saps demand. And a worldwide flu scare could affect attendance at the international event.

Despite the times, though, the four-day conference that opens Monday at Reliant Center will bring tens of thousands of energy professionals to get a glimpse of the latest technological advancements and hear about policy issues affecting the industry.

OTC spokeswoman Margaret Watson said all interior exhibit space at Reliant Center, Reliant Stadium and outside between the two is sold out.

"In uncertain economic times, attendees come to OTC to find solutions that can reduce costs or improve results," Watson said.

Conference organizers don't project attendance before the event. Watson said pre-registration numbers have been good but that attendance may suffer at least slightly because of the flu worries and some nations' advisories against travel to the U.S.

The conference also comes amid increased debate about opening additional areas off U.S. shores for oil and gas drilling.

Industry executives will discuss the topic at an OTC panel Tuesday.

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