

(3) *Abatement of emergencies.* When the noncompliance is resulting in an emergency, the authorized Forest officer may take action as necessary to abate the emergency. The total cost to the Forest Service of taking actions to abate an emergency becomes an obligation of the operator.

(i) Emergency situations include, but are not limited to, imminent dangers to public health or safety or irreparable resource damage.

(ii) The authorized Forest officer shall promptly serve a bill for such costs upon the operator by certified mail.

§ 228.114 Material noncompliance proceedings.

(a) *Evaluation of referral.* The compliance officer shall promptly evaluate a referral made by the authorized Forest officer pursuant to § 228.113(b)(1) of this subpart.

(b) *Dismissal of referral.* The compliance officer shall dismiss the referral if the compliance officer determines that there is not adequate evidence to support a reasonable belief that:

(1) The operator was not in compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in a notice of noncompliance by the deadline specified in the notice, or an extension approved by the authorized Forest officer; or

(2) The noncompliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the notice of noncompliance may be material.

(c) *Initiation of proceedings.* The compliance officer shall initiate a material noncompliance proceeding if the compliance officer agrees that there is adequate evidence to support a reasonable belief that an operator has failed to come into compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in a notice of noncompliance by the deadline specified in the notice, or extension approved by the authorized Forest officer, and that the noncompliance may be material.

(1) *Notice of proceedings.* The compliance officer shall inform the lessee and operator of the material noncompliance proceedings by certified mail, return receipt requested.

(2) *Content of notice.* The notice of the material noncompliance proceeding shall include the following:

(i) The specific reclamation requirement(s) or other standard(s) of which the operator may be in material noncompliance;

(ii) A description of the measures that are required to correct the violation;

(iii) A statement that if the compliance officer finds that the operator is in material noncompliance with a reclamation requirement or other standard applicable to the lease, the Secretary of the Interior will not be able to issue new leases or approve new transfers of leases to the operator, any subsidiary or affiliate of the operator, or any person controlled by or under common control with the operator until the compliance officer finds that the operator has come into compliance with such requirement or standard; and

(iv) A recitation of the specific procedures governing the material noncompliance proceeding set forth in paragraphs (d) through (g) of this section.

(d) *Answer.* Within 30 calendar days after receiving the notice of the proceeding, the operator may submit, in person, in writing, or through a representative, an answer containing information and argument in opposition to the proposed material noncompliance finding, including information that raises a genuine dispute over the material facts. In that submission, the operator also may:

(1) Request an informal hearing with the compliance officer; and

(2) Identify pending administrative or judicial appeal(s) which are relevant to the proposed material noncompliance finding and provide information which shows the relevance of such appeal(s).

(e) *Informal hearing.* If the operator requests an informal hearing, it shall be held within 20 calendar days from the date that the compliance officer receives the operator's request.

(1) The compliance officer may postpone the date of the informal hearing if the operator requests a postponement in writing.

(2) At the hearing, the operator, appearing personally or through an attorney or another authorized representative, may informally present and explain evidence and argument in opposition to the proposed material non-compliance finding.

(3) A transcript of the informal hearing shall not be required.

(f) *Additional procedures as to disputed facts.* If the compliance officer finds that the answer raises a genuine dispute over facts essential to the proposed material noncompliance finding, the compliance officer shall so inform the operator by certified mail, return receipt requested. Within 10 days of receiving this notice, the operator may request a fact-finding conference on those disputed facts.

(1) The fact-finding conference shall be scheduled within 20 calendar days from the date the compliance officer receives the operator's request, unless the operator and compliance officer agree otherwise.

(2) At the fact-finding conference, the operator shall have the opportunity to appear with counsel, submit documentary evidence, present witnesses, and confront the person(s) the Forest Service presents.

(3) A transcribed record of the fact-finding conference shall be made, unless the operator and the compliance officer by mutual agreement waive the requirement for a transcript. The transcript will be made available to the operator at cost upon request.

(4) The compliance officer may preside over the fact-finding conference or designate another authorized Forest officer to preside over the fact-finding conference.

(5) Following the fact-finding conference, the authorized Forest officer who presided over the conference shall promptly prepare written findings of fact based upon the preponderance of the evidence. The compliance officer may reject findings of fact prepared by another authorized Forest officer, in whole or in part, if the compliance officer specifically determines that such findings are arbitrary and capricious or clearly erroneous.

(g) *Dismissal of proceedings.* The compliance officer shall dismiss the material noncompliance proceeding if, be-

fore the compliance officer renders a decision pursuant to paragraph (h) of this section, the authorized Forest officer who made the referral finds that the operator has come into compliance with the applicable requirements or standards identified in the notice of proceeding.

(h) *Compliance officer's decision.* The compliance officer shall base the decision on the entire record, which shall consist of the authorized Forest officer's referral and its accompanying statement of facts and exhibits, information and argument that the operator provided in an answer, any information and argument that the operator provided in an informal hearing if one was held, and the findings of fact if a fact-finding conference was held.

(1) *Content.* The compliance officer's decision shall state whether the operator has violated the requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the notice of proceeding and, if so, whether that noncompliance is material given the requirements of 30 U.S.C. 226(g), the stipulations included in the lease at the direction of the Forest Service, the regulations in this subpart or an approved surface use plan of operations, the applicable onshore oil and gas order, or an applicable notice to lessees, transferees, and operators. If the compliance officer finds that the operator is in material noncompliance, the decision also shall:

(i) Describe the measures that are required to correct the violation;

(ii) Apprise the operator that the Secretary of the Interior is being notified that the operator has been found to be in material noncompliance with a reclamation requirement or other standard applicable to the lease; and

(iii) State that the decision is the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture.

(2) *Service.* The compliance officer shall serve the decision upon the operator by certified mail, return receipt requested. If the operator is found to be in material noncompliance, the compliance officer also shall immediately send a copy of the decision to the appropriate Bureau of Land Management office and to the Secretary of the Interior.

(i) *Petition for withdrawal of finding.* If an operator who has been found to be in material noncompliance under the provisions of this section believes that the operations have subsequently come into compliance with the applicable requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the compliance officer's decision, the operator may submit a written petition requesting that the material noncompliance finding be withdrawn. The petition shall be submitted to the authorized Forest officer who issued the operator the notice of noncompliance under § 228.113(a) of this subpart and shall include information or exhibits which shows that the operator has come into compliance with the requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the compliance officer's decision.

(1) *Response to petition.* Within 30 calendar days after receiving the operator's petition for withdrawal, the authorized Forest officer shall submit a written statement to the compliance officer as to whether the authorized Forest officer agrees that the operator has come into compliance with the requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the compliance officer's decision. If the authorized Forest officer disagrees with the operator, the written statement shall be accompanied by a complete statement of the facts supported by appropriate exhibits.

(2) *Additional procedures as to disputed material facts.* If the compliance officer finds that the authorized Forest officer's response raises a genuine dispute over facts material to the decision as to whether the operator has come into compliance with the requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the compliance officer's decision, the compliance officer shall so notify the operator and authorized Forest officer by certified mail, return receipt requested. The notice shall also advise the operator that the fact finding procedures specified in paragraph (f) of this section apply to the compliance officer's decision on the petition for withdrawal.

(3) *Compliance officer's decision.* The compliance officer shall base the decision on the petition on the entire record, which shall consist of the operator's petition for withdrawal and its accompanying exhibits, the authorized Forest officer's response to the petition

and, if applicable, its accompanying statement of facts and exhibits, and if a fact-finding conference was held, the findings of fact. The compliance officer shall serve the decision on the operator by certified mail.

(i) If the compliance officer finds that the operator remains in violation of requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the decision finding that the operator was in material noncompliance, the decision on the petition for withdrawal shall identify such requirement(s) or standard(s) and describe the measures that are required to correct the violation(s).

(ii) If the compliance officer finds that the operator has subsequently come into compliance with the requirement(s) or standard(s) identified in the compliance officer's decision finding that the operator was in material noncompliance, the compliance officer also shall immediately send a copy of the decision on the petition for withdrawal to the appropriate Bureau of Land Management office and notify the Secretary of the Interior that the operator has come into compliance.

(j) *List of operators found to be in material noncompliance.* The Deputy Chief, National Forest System, shall compile and maintain a list of operators who have been found to be in material noncompliance with reclamation requirements and other standards as provided in 30 U.S.C. 226(g), the regulations in this subpart, a stipulation included in a lease at the direction of the Forest Service, or an approved surface use plan of operations, the applicable on-shore oil and gas order, or an applicable notice to lessees, transferees, and operators, for a lease on National Forest System lands to which such standards apply. This list shall be made available to Regional Foresters, Forest Supervisors, and upon request, members of the public.

§ 228.115 Additional notice of decisions.

(a) The authorized Forest officer shall promptly post notices provided by the Bureau of Land Management of:

(1) Competitive lease sales which the Bureau plans to conduct that include National Forest System lands;