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MMS and Offshore Operators Establish Deep Water Current Monitoring Program

The Minerals Management Service and offshore oil and gas producers are cooperating on a pioneering monitoring program to improve the nation's understanding of powerful ocean currents that have the potential to affect deep water operations across the Gulf of Mexico.

Under the program, operating companies will collect and share comprehensive current data from deep water drilling and production sites.

According to Chris Oynes, MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Director, the data on the currents will be publicly available on the internet, and "will be a tremendous resource for ocean scientists and engineers from government agencies, universities and the private sector."

Oynes added, "This cooperative effort between government and industry will advance our understanding of these currents and ultimately improve our ability to prepare for them."

The monitoring program will help ensure that operators and drilling contractors have better information on existing and forecasted current conditions. The data and predictive information will enable them to curtail drilling operations before currents build to threatening levels. The monitoring program will also enhance capabilities for the design of deepwater production structures.

Details of the current monitoring program are described in a Notice to Lessees (2004-G21) that was issued by MMS on Nov. 24, 2004. This guidance was developed by oceanographers and engineers from MMS and industry.

The NTL applies to floating production facilities and drilling rigs in water depths greater than 400 meters (1,312 feet) and will ensure that the current data are gathered and reported in a consistent manner.

"In the long term, the measurement and sharing of data on ocean currents will provide industry with better parameters to which they can design platforms and their ancillary equipment such as oil and gas risers and mooring systems," said Oynes.

The Minerals Management Service is the federal bureau in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in federal offshore waters. Currently, about 30 percent of the oil and 23 percent of the gas produced domestically comes from these federal waters. The bureau also collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands. MMS disbursed approximately \$8 billion in Fiscal Year 2004 and more than \$143 billion since it was created in 1982. Nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund annually for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

MMS Main Website: www.mms.gov
Gulf of Mexico Website: www.gomr.mms.gov

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