



**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Minerals Management Service  
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region**

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### **Post-Hurricane Startup Procedures Fail to Identify Pipeline Damage Resulting in Oil Spill**

Following passage of a hurricane, an operator of a crude oil pipeline system determined after system assessment that the pipeline integrity had not been breached and ordered resumption of production operations. During startup operations, the pipeline's supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system was working intermittently. Further, voice communications with a platform operator ceased after telephones became inoperative.

Throughout startup, pressure safety lows (PSL's) at each platform on the pipeline system remained within normal operating levels. Further, overflights of the pipeline system did not reveal any signs of oil release, thereby suggesting normal operations.

Upon resumption of SCADA operations and voice communications, it was discovered that produced oil was not being received at the onshore tank battery. The pipeline system was immediately shut in. Shortly thereafter, a large slick was reported. Investigations revealed that the pipeline had suffered a catastrophic failure caused by a mudslide. The incident resulted in the loss of over 8,200 barrels of crude oil into the environment.

Therefore, from this information, the following are recommended:

1. That operators adhere to established post-hurricane pipeline operations startup procedures, and if no procedures are in place, to develop and implement them.
2. That operators of pipelines in mudslide-prone areas should review and, where appropriate, revise post-hurricane startup procedures to address additional steps that will be taken to ensure pipeline integrity prior to resumption of operations.
3. That operators should assess the effectiveness of PSL's in pipeline leak detection and the need for consideration of alternate and/or supplementary leak detection methods if PSL's are deemed potentially inadequate on individual pipelines and/or pipeline networks.

For details of the accident, see OCS Report MMS 99-0053. Copies of the report may be obtained from the MMS Public Information Office located at 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123 (1-800-200-GULF or local 504-736-2519).

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MMS Internet Homepage: <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>