



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA SEEKS COMMENT FOR THE INCIDENTAL HARASSMENT OF MARINE MAMMALS IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking comment on a request from the Minerals Management Service for the incidental harassment of marine mammals, which may result from the removal of offshore oil production structures in the Gulf of Mexico.

During exploration, development, and production operations for off-shore oil production, the area of the sea-floor around oil production locations becomes a repository of equipment and structures used in these activities. In compliance with Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act regulations and Minerals Management Service guidelines, lease operators are required to remove sea-floor obstructions within one year of lease termination or after structures have been deemed obsolete or unusable.

There are two primary methodologies used in the Gulf for decommissioning structures; non-explosive and explosive severance. Explosive activities use specialized charges to sever the target. Since the underwater detonation of explosive charges generates high levels of acoustic energy, explosive demolition activities have the potential to cause the incidental harassment of nearby marine mammals and require an authorization from NOAA under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. For this reason, Minerals Management Service has requested on behalf of the oil industry an incidental take authorization from NOAA.

To help protect marine mammals and sea turtles in the vicinity of the activity, the oil industry proposes to use mitigation and monitoring measures prior to detonation activities; including aerial surveys and passive acoustic monitoring for large charges. If a whale, dolphin, or sea turtle is sighted within a designated area (nearly one mile from the removal site for the largest charges), they will postpone the activity until the animal departs the area.

NOAA Fisheries Service has preliminarily determined that these detonation activities will not result in more than a negligible impact on affected marine mammal stocks. It is anticipated that no marine mammals or sea turtles would be seriously injured or killed during these operations.

NOAA's Fisheries Service will accept comments on the application and proposed authorization through May 22, 2006. Comments should be addressed to: Steve Leathery, Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

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A copy of the application and Federal Register notice may be obtained by contacting the same office, or online at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>