

FOR RELEASE:
January 03, 2011

Office of Public Affairs

BOEMRE Provides Additional Clarity for Certain Activities Suspended under the Deepwater Moratorium

Issues Notice to 13 Companies

WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) today notified 13 companies whose deepwater drilling activities were suspended by last year's deepwater drilling moratorium that they may be able to resume those previously-approved activities without the need to submit revised exploration or development plans for supplemental National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews. Before resuming those activities without additional NEPA review, however, the companies must comply with BOEMRE's new policies and regulations.

"Going forward, we are substantially enhancing our environmental reviews and analysis under NEPA," said BOEMRE Director Michael R. Bromwich. "But as we move forward, we are taking into account the special circumstances of those companies whose operations were interrupted by the moratorium and ensuring that they are able to resume previously-approved activities. For those companies that were in the midst of operations at the time of the deepwater suspensions, today's notification is a significant step toward resuming their permitted activity."

Today's notice lays out the steps these companies must take for previously-approved operations to restart. This includes compliance with new regulations and information requirements in Notices to Lessees (NTL) N06 and N10, and the Interim Final Safety Rule.

These operators will not be required to revise a previously submitted Exploration Plan or Development Operations Coordination Document (DOCD) if the worst-case discharge estimated for the project, as calculated pursuant to NTL-N06, is less than the worst-case discharge estimate included by the company in its Oil Spill Response Plan. However, if the worst-case discharge exceeds the Oil Spill Response Plan, further reviews will be conducted.

As described in guidance issued by BOEMRE on December 13, 2010, new exploration and development drilling operations must be conducted under new or revised plans subject to appropriate NEPA analysis (<http://www.boemre.gov/ooc/press/2010/press1213.htm>).

The 13 companies that received today's notice are: ATP Oil & Gas Corp., BHP Billiton Petroleum (GOM) Inc., Chevron USA Inc., Cobalt International Energy, ENI U.S. Operating Company Inc., Hess Corp., Kerr-McGee Oil & Gas Corp., Marathon Oil Company, Murphy Exploration & Production Company – USA, Noble Energy Inc., Shell Offshore Inc., Statoil USA E & P Inc., and Walter Oil & Gas Corp.

For more information on the new regulations, go to: http://www.gomr.boemre.gov/homepg/offshore/safety/well_permits.html.

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