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MMS Shares Regulatory Expertise with the West African Pipeline Authority

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Interior Department’s Minerals Management Service (MMS) shared its oil and gas regulatory expertise with the newly established West African Gas Pipeline Company (WAGPCo) and its multilateral regulatory body, the West African Gas Pipeline Authority (WAGPA), during recent conferences held in Ghana and Togo. The MMS was asked by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist the WAGPA in developing the regulatory capacity needed to manage the pipeline. The WAGPA consists of state regulatory authorities from Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.

The conferences exposed the delegates to various oil and gas regulatory practices, while exploring different methods for enforcing these regulations. With support from multiple federal agencies, the conferences demonstrated the U.S. Government’s commitment to assisting the sub-region in obtaining a stable and low cost source of energy.

“I’m proud that the MMS was asked to share its regulatory expertise with officials from these four countries,” said MMS Director Liz Birnbaum. “MMS is working closely with USAID in assisting Ghana and other West African countries in developing their energy sectors.”

In opening the conference, Ghana’s Deputy Minister of Energy, the Honorable Emmanuel Armah-Kofi Buah, stated: “WAGPA is being encouraged to assume its proper regulatory authority to manage the West African Gas Pipeline’s safety and security. Environmental concerns must be addressed and WAGPCo and WAGPA must take mitigation measures to prevent damage to the pipeline.”

The MMS presented a comprehensive overview of its regulatory system as it applies to pipelines, including its inspection and enforcement program, use of industry standards, review of current MMS pipeline regulations, and MMS pipeline research. The conferences aimed to build the capacity of West African law enforcement and maritime and fisheries officials to enhance the regulation and security of key offshore assets and resources.

The WAGPCo is harnessing the produced and associated gas from the Gulf of Guinea and Niger Delta areas to export to other markets. The West African Gas Pipeline is 421 miles long, stretching from the gas reserves in Nigeria’s Escravos Region to Benin, Togo, and Ghana. This is the first regional natural gas transmission system in sub-Saharan Africa. The pipeline was commissioned in May 2008 and is expected to be in service by the end of 2009. The 354 mile long offshore section runs through the waters of Benin, Togo and Ghana, approximately 9.3 miles to 12 miles offshore, in water depths between 98 and 250 feet. The capacity is 177 billion cubic feet of natural gas per year, and the pipeline is designed to operate at 3,000 pounds per square inch (psi).

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