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****FEATURE ARTICLE****

YEAR-END ROUNDUP ARTICLE FOR SEA TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE
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Times are changing on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). At the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS), we're designing an OCS program that adapts to those changes and works to the benefit of everyone. And we're doing it with your help.

Such a program can't be designed without talking to (and, more importantly, listening to) the nation's stakeholders. If we want to satisfy the public, the energy industry and our environmental and economic needs, we must use the ideas of experts in each of those sectors. We must build those ideas into the solutions we craft. If you've watched us this past year, you've seen we've done just that:

--We've sought public comment on the design of our leasing program in the Central and Western Gulf of Mexico. We want the opinions of everyone concerned. Is the present system the best that can be developed? What needs strengthening? What can we do to boost environmental protection, assure a fair return to the Treasury, strengthen the energy industry and take care of the concerns of area residents?

--We've increased our drive to obtain the best scientific information about areas in which we permit activities. We'll allow activities only where good science tells us we can do so without harming the environment. Some areas, such as the Florida Keys and Bristol Bay, have been put off limits to offshore oil and gas activity because of their sensitivity. We'll review future activities on a case-by-case basis, taking your ideas and concerns into account.

--We're asking all companies, large and small, to tell us how they'll ensure safety and environmental care in their operations. We're urging them to adopt API Recommended Practices (RP 75) and to develop a Safety and Environmental Management Program (SEMP). It's more sensible to have companies design their own effective programs

for safety and the environment than to impose strict Federal regulations and compliance inspections.

--We're examining incentives to encourage deep-water operations, and looking at ways to recover these valuable oil and gas resources in a manner that's environmentally safe and economically sound.

--We're seeking opinions on how to design regulations for the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which calls for increased financial responsibility in case of oil spills. We need your help to craft rules that will maintain a healthy domestic industry with dependable jobs while assuring that any spills are cleaned up by those responsible for them. We're conducting workshops around the country to tell people about the law and to get their ideas on how to implement it fairly.

--We've issued a rule requiring an increased level of insurance to guarantee that lease abandonment and site clearance costs will be borne by the company, not the American public. Our commitment to the continued health of the marine environment requires that depleted oil and gas leases be properly plugged and cleared of debris. This commitment, which is shared by most of the offshore industry, will build confidence in the OCS program.

-- We are reassessing the ability of older structures to sustain safe operations and ensure environmental quality. While we're developing the regulations to do that, we're not doing it in a vacuum. We're seeking ideas from offshore engineers about assessment and re-qualification of offshore platforms. We're required to ensure that offshore operations are clean and safe, and we want the views of those who know those operations best.

Two somewhat new MMS efforts, our International Program and our Sand and Gravel Program, will grow further during 1994:

--The U.S. has set a world standard for offshore safety, sound environmental standards and expertise in royalty collection. Other countries seek to benefit from our experience and we're doing what we can to help them. MMS is currently working with Hungary and Russia to build a framework for sustainable, private sector development while ensuring environmental quality. We've also reached agreements with counterpart agencies in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway and Japan.

--We've reached agreements with most East Coast states to

investigate the feasibility of using offshore sand and gravel--for the construction industry in New England and for beach restoration from New Jersey through South Carolina. We are also working with Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Alabama on similar assessments.

In short, we at MMS are changing the way we do business. We're listening, testing old assumptions, melding safety, environmental concerns, industry needs and public opinion into a strong program with a sound future. We're determined to reach that objective, and to do it with your advice and help.

-MMS-

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