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MMS RELEASES PRELIMINARY OFFSHORE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT
FROM NORTHRIDGE EARTHQUAKE (#40004)

The Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today released a preliminary, post-earthquake seismic damage assessment of natural gas and oil facilities in federal waters offshore southern and central California. Despite severe damage onshore, the report shows no structural harm or significant oil spills from the network of offshore installations.

Preliminary MMS damage assessments from the January 17 Northridge earthquake found that the 23 platforms located in federal waters offshore California sustained the earthquake with no structural damage.

"The offshore safety standards regulated by the MMS were designed for natural seismic occurrences," said MMS Director Tom Fry. "Safety systems on platforms offshore Los Angeles and Ventura Counties were activated once seismic activity started on the morning of January 17 and production operations were suspended without major incident."

Following the quake, MMS inspectors conducted aerial inspections of all offshore pipelines and surveyed the structural and operational integrity of offshore facilities during onsite platform inspections. Further seismic-related monitoring of offshore facilities will continue as a component of the MMS offshore inspection program.

MMS issued a directive to all offshore leasees and operators requiring formal inspection and damage assessment of all platforms, pipelines and related structures in federal waters. Formal reports on survey findings are due to the MMS for evaluation by February 7, 1994.

A minor oil spill occurred off Pacific Operators' Platform Hogan as a result of an onshore disposal system failure due to a power outage shortly following the initial quake. The spill released an estimated 1,260 gallons of treated process saltwater contaminated with about two barrels of oil into the ocean. The spill was immediately contained and recovered.

Texaco's Platform Habitat, which produces approximately 28 million cubic feet of natural gas per day, was brought back on line shortly after the initial quake at the request of Southern California Gas Co. to accommodate southland household energy demands. After structural assessment of the platform, MMS approved continued production. The platform is located about eight miles off Carpenteria, California, in 290 feet of water.

Offshore production platforms contain numerous safety devices required by Government regulation as well as by voluntary industry procedures. Safety devices include shut-in controls which close surface and subsurface valves to immediately suspend platform production operations in the event of an emergency. In addition, fire and spill response, first aid, and personnel evacuation procedures are identified and routinely tested to ensure emergency preparedness.

"We are pleased to see that safety shut-off systems performed well," said Fry. "In the immensity of human suffering and structural damage onshore, it is heartening to know that the safety of workers and the environment at our offshore oil platforms was assured."

The Minerals Management Service is the agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior responsible for administering the federal offshore natural gas, oil, and mineral management programs.

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