



U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

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**MMS Issues Final Revisions to Guidelines on
Preparing Offshore Exploration and Development Plans**

The Gulf of Mexico OCS Regional Office of the Minerals Management Service recently issued revised guidelines on how to prepare offshore oil and gas exploration and development plans for oil and gas leases in Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Minerals Management Service (MMS), an agency in the Department of the Interior, oversees oil and gas operations in offshore Federal waters. The law governing these operations requires that a company submit and receive MMS approval of either an exploration plan or a development plan before it can conduct drilling or production operations. The MMS has developed regulations to implement the law regarding exploration and development plans. The guidance issued today further clarifies these regulatory requirements for operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

Previously, this guidance was contained in 12 different documents issued over the past several years. The new guidance, in the form of a document called a Notice to Lessees and Operators, updates the older guidance and consolidates it into one document. It will provide much greater clarity of exactly what information an operator must submit to MMS and thus streamlines the entire process, saving countless hours in clarifying questions. The Gulf of Mexico Region (GOM) of MMS receives between 600 and 700 plans per year.

An earlier version of this guidance was issued on April 27, 2000, and workshops were held in June 2000 for affected parties. As a result of concerns raised at the workshops, and written comments from participants, the MMS Gulf of Mexico OCS Region further revised the guidelines and issued the new guidelines on December 26, 2000. A tabular summary of the changes made to the April 27, 2000, guidelines is presented. Most are minor technical amendments. Major changes are made to the requirements for oil spill and chemical product information, by clarifying the nature of each requirement, and by limiting certain information requirements to only those plans that must undergo a rigorous environmental assessment for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.

GOM Regional Director Chris Oynes noted that the new guidelines provide greater clarity regarding information needed for compliance with the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.

The Minerals Management Service is issuing this Notice to Lessees and Operators on an interim basis. Minerals Management Service plans to rewrite its regulations regarding exploration and development plans. When that happens, the Notice to Lessees and Operators will be rewritten to bring it into accord with the new regulations.

Copies of the Notice to Lessees and Operators issued today are available by visiting the Public Information Office of the MMS at 1201 Elmwood Park Blvd in New Orleans or by accessing the Minerals Management Service web site at http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/regs/ntls/ntl_1st.html. Refer to NTL 2000-G21.

The MMS, a bureau in the U.S. Department of the Interior, is the federal agency that manages the nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf. The agency also collects, accounts for and [disburses more than \\$5 billion per year in revenues](#) from federal offshore mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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MMS's Website Address: <http://www.mms.gov>