

The NewsRoom

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MMS Rewrites OCS Oil and Gas Production Requirements

Limits Flaring and Venting

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) published a Final Rule today in the Federal Register that sets limits on the flaring or venting of natural gas into the atmosphere.

"This rule gives us better tools to monitor closely the amount of flaring and venting that occur offshore oil and gas production," said MMS Director Liz Birnbaum. "We believe that these improvements will ultimately help us reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted from MMS-regulated facilities."

This rule establishes the criteria for natural gas flaring and venting and sets limits on the time that natural gas may be flared or vented during certain situations. Flaring is the burning of natural gas as it is released into the atmosphere, and venting is the release of natural gas into the atmosphere without igniting it. Although the vast majority of natural gas produced from offshore Federal acreage is captured and brought to market, small amounts of flaring and venting are sometimes necessary during the production of oil and gas. For example, if a piece of equipment fails to work properly, it may be necessary to briefly divert the flowing natural gas to a controlled flare or vent system for safety reasons. MMS regulations allow oil and gas companies to flare or vent small amounts of natural gas in these circumstances.

The final rule requires the installation of meters to accurately measure all flared and vented natural gas on facilities that process more than 2,000 barrels of oil per day. This improvement is based on a recommendation from the GAO. The report, "Natural Gas Flaring and Venting—Opportunities to Improve Data and Reduce Emissions" (GAO-04-809), recommended that more accurate records be kept to determine the amount of resource flared or vented, and the volume of greenhouse gas these practices contribute to the atmosphere each year.

The MMS has monitored the total amount of natural gas flared and vented, but operators in the past have not been required to differentiate between the two categories. To improve data collection, the final rule will require operators to report flaring and venting volumes separately to MMS.

The proposed rule was published March 6, 2007, for public comment. The MMS received eight comments through June 4, 2007 and considered them before issuing this final rule.

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