



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

NEWS RELEASE

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MMS Clarifies Seismic Survey Requirements for Lease Sale 184

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) today issued a formal Notice to Leasees (NTL) to provide interim guidance on the new requirements to regulate seismic surveys to protect marine mammals such as the sperm whale. The new NTL 2002-G07 clarifies the requirements in Stipulation No. 5 issued as part of the Final Notice of Sale for Western Gulf Lease Sale 184. The sale is scheduled to be held August 21, 2002.

The MMS issued the NTL to offer interim guidance to the geophysical community on how to implement these mitigations. MMS Regional Director Chris Oynes stated that "Information is provided to surveyors about the ramp-up procedure, the exclusion zone for visual monitoring, the roles of visual observers, and reporting on marine mammals." All surveyors must use these measures during all seismic survey operations using airgun arrays in waters deeper than 200 meters (656 feet) throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

MMS had imposed the requirements on seismic activity as a result of a formal Biological Opinion on the part of the NOAA Fisheries. NOAA Fisheries issued the Opinion under the Endangered Species Act.

NOAA Fisheries was concerned that during the conduct of geophysical operations, surveyors using an airgun or airgun arrays could impact an endangered species, such as the sperm whale, which is protected under the Endangered Species Act.

This new NTL provides information for the calculation of a generic exclusion zone and procedures for visual monitoring of the exclusion zone during ramp-up procedures and during seismic survey operations. Briefly, ramp-up is achieved by a progressive buildup of energy output from a single airgun to the desired operational intensity of the air gun arrays. This is achieved by gradually increasing the number of guns fired simultaneously within an array. For complete details, please refer to NTL 2002-G07, "Implementation of Seismic Survey Mitigation Measures," at website: http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/regs/ntls/ntl_1st.html.

Identical requirements will be imposed on permittees who file for geological and geophysical permits.

MMS is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf in federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for and disburses mineral revenues from federal and Indian leases. These revenues totaled nearly \$10 billion in 2001 and more than \$120 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Annually, nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

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