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MMS Adopts Final Rule on Offshore Training

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) today announced a series of amendments to agency training rules for operators working offshore on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The final training rule was published in the February 5, 1997 Federal Register.

MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman characterized the rule as "an important step forward. It simplifies the requirements, is written in a clear and understandable way, and provides for new training methods. Overall, the simplification provided by this rule will result in a 35 percent reduction in training requirements."

According to Quarterman, the amendments:

- * reduce significantly the number of training course from about 32 to eight -- thereby saving time and money, but ensuring that the OCS workforce receives appropriate training;
- * eliminate refresher course requirements in well control and production -- also expected to save time and money;
- * embrace alternative training methods, provided with the advent of technology, the use of non-traditional computer-based training are now more viable and could be used in lieu of or in combination with conventional classroom based courses; and
- * eliminate a 120-day window during which time subsequent refresher training was to have been completed -- a change that will reduce record keeping for industry and the MMS.

"These amendments are primarily process driven and do not compromise the quality of training the OCS workforce receives," Quarterman declared. "The additional flexibility provided by this rule will enable companies to focus their training program on topics specific to their particular offshore operations."

"The next step in the evolution of MMS' offshore training program will be the development of a performance-based training system," continued Quarterman. "Under this scenario, MMS may shift more of the responsibility to industry for establishing training methods and frequencies. Such a program may also include self-certification, operator performance reviews, MMS spot testing, or hands-on simulator testing."

Quarterman said the agency intends to get out of the school certification business itself and will draft a notice of proposed rulemaking outlining a performance-based system. "We examined the possibility of providing for third party accreditation of training schools, but it just doesn't make sense to initiate a third party accreditation system while preparing to draft a rule to eliminate school accreditation requirements altogether," she said, noting "there was not universal support for the notion."

MMS is the federal agency that manages the Nation's natural gas, oil and other mineral resources on the OCS, and collects, accounts for, and disburses about \$4 billion yearly in revenues from offshore federal mineral leases and from onshore mineral leases on federal and Indian lands.

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