

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
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**Innovation 12**

**MMS to Simplify Environmental Impact Statements**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) announced today that it is taking steps to produce shorter, more readable Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). As part of the Administration's call to simplify and streamline government, future MMS EISs will describe the proposed action in simple, non-technical terms; be written in plain English and eliminate jargon; and focus on relevant environmental issues, eliminating redundant material and unnecessary background information. These changes should result in environmental impact statements shortened up to 25 percent or more. The announcement was made at the semi-annual meeting of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Scientific Committee of the Secretary's Minerals Management Advisory Board.

MMS prepares EISs for its 5-year OCS natural gas and oil leasing programs, as well as for proposed individual lease sales. Since the first EIS was prepared for the OCS program more than 25 years ago, the documents have gradually become longer and more difficult for MMS' customers and decisionmakers to use. MMS plans to reverse this trend beginning with the combined EIS for proposed lease sales 166 and 168 in the Gulf of Mexico scheduled for 1997.

MMS Director Cynthia Quarterman emphasized that user-friendly EISs will continue to include all the information needed for making informed environmental decisions. "Streamlined EISs will provide improved products that better meet the needs of our customers -- a shorter EIS for management, a more focused EIS for decisionmakers, and a more readable EIS for the public," she explained. "I'm confident that we can continue to streamline the process while maintaining the level of quality that earned MMS the 1996 Federal Environmental Quality Award for excellence in environmental decisionmaking."

"MMS EISs may never become leisure time reading for most people, but we're working to make them less onerous," she added. "We'll be asking for feedback on the new EIS format as part of the regular EIS public comment process."

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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