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***OP-ED***

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**Oil in the Sea**

According to a recently released report from the National Academy of Sciences, far more oil enters the ocean from natural, underwater seeps than from offshore production platforms. While some people may find this difficult to believe, the truth is that over the past 20 years, less than .001 percent of the oil produced in U.S. state and federal waters has been spilled. The seeps from the earth's strata introduce about 1700 barrels of oil a day into U.S. marine waters, which is about 150 times the amount from oil and gas activities.

Worldwide, the vast majority of incidents in which petroleum has entered the ocean are caused by natural seeps, marine transportation, and industrial and municipal wastes and runoff. Agricultural runoff is another cause of marine pollution. Yet, little if any irrevocable damage to the marine environment on a broad oceanic scale is caused by either natural seeps or accidental spills, according to the National Academy of Sciences study, "Oil in the Sea III". The study also found that leaks from platforms in federal waters have decreased significantly over the past 29 years. By any reasonable standard, offshore oil rigs have an excellent safety record. The federal government's Minerals Management Service continually seeks operational improvements that reduce the risk to offshore personnel and to the environment.

The agency's regulatory program prevents accidents and pollution at sea by ensuring that every company operating in federal waters must use the best and safest technologies on existing operations; inspect safety devices and systems; conduct oil spill drills, and have oil spill contingency plans in place that identify response equipment and procedures.

A key recommendation from a previous National Academy study encouraged cooperation of federal and state agencies to promote cleaner extraction techniques, enforce regulatory standards, and examine the condition of aging pipelines to minimize releases of oil in the ocean. All of these things have been and are being done.

Without question, America's energy demand is rising. It is up to MMS and their partners in government and industry to diligently monitor production safety standards for the protection of offshore personnel and the environment.

**Johnnie Burton**

**Director**

**Minerals Management Service**

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