

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Office of Public Affairs**

NEWS RELEASE

Office of the Secretary

May 22, 2007

CONTACT: Shane Wolfe, 202-208-6416

Kempthorne: No Longer 'Business as Usual' for Employee Health and Safety Programs at Interior

WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne today assured Interior employees that he is personally committed to improving the health, safety and security of Interior workplaces and urged them to be more vigilant and safety-conscious in their work, avoiding a “business-as-usual” attitude.

“There is nothing more important to me personally and to the Department’s mission than ensuring that your workplace is healthy and safe and that employees, volunteers and visitors to our parks, refuges and other lands are protected from hazards, accidents and other dangers,” Kempthorne told an employee assembly at the Main Interior Building.

Significant challenges face the department, he noted, because employees often carry out dangerous work, including law enforcement, wildland firefighting, search and rescue, wilderness assessments, and road and building maintenance. Interior’s 73,000 employees and 200,000 volunteers work at more than 2,400 sites, ranging from urban offices and laboratories to remote parks and refuges and massive dams and offshore oil and gas rigs.

Kempthorne stressed his commitment to meeting these challenges. “We will seek to provide the personnel and organizational resources necessary to reach the highest standards of occupational health and workplace safety,” he said. “We can’t settle for business as usual. We must do all that we responsibly can to make Interior a model workplace when it comes to safety.”

Interior welcomes millions of visitors to parks, monuments, refuges and recreational areas each year, Kempthorne noted:

“Historically, injuries and accidents increase in the summer season because we have more visitors and work outdoors more. This is a time when our employees and volunteers need to be especially vigilant, both for your own safety and for the safety of others.” He also encouraged employees to report anything they believe might present an undue threat, noting, “We are all responsible for ensuring the safety of our workplaces.”

As part of his commitment to a safer, healthier workplace, Kempthorne noted that Interior Deputy Secretary Lynn Scarlett last year suggested to the Inspector General’s office that it conduct a department-wide evaluation of the effectiveness of our health and safety programs at Interior. “Various department and bureau offices have been working with the Inspector General’s team for the past several months to provide the information needed for this evaluation,” the Secretary noted. “I look forward to the Inspector General’s report and recommendations on how we can improve.”

Kempthorne commended Interior’s National Business Center for conducting environmental, safety and health audits of major departmental facilities, including the Main and South Interior Buildings in Washington, D.C. and the Interior Building in Denver. The center contracted for the audits as a proactive way to ensure health and safety at these major workplaces.

Kempthorne called the Main Interior Building a special challenge. “This historic building is more than 70 years old and is undergoing a

major, multi-year modernization to refurbish the structure, remove or safely seal the asbestos, and bring the building up to code," he said. "Because the work moves from wing to wing each year, special precautions are taken to protect employee health and safety."

Corridors undergoing modernization are sealed, he noted, and negative air pressure inside the work areas ensures asbestos and other potentially harmful substances do not leak out. Electronic sensing devices on each floor closely monitor the air quality to ensure that if there is an accidental release, building officials know about it immediately and can take precautionary actions.

The Secretary also discussed enhanced security for employees in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. "I know that many of you have concerns about what would happen in the event of a major terrorist attack or similar crisis," he said. "We are continuously taking action to improve the response to various threats."

Kempthorne noted that Interior has completed its comprehensive revision of the Continuity of Operations Plan, which guides efforts to carry on essential functions and restore normal activities in response to a range of emergencies. He also recently approved a new Emergency Operations Center -- now under construction as part of the Main Interior Building modernization project -- to enhance the department's intelligence, information dissemination, and response to emergencies.

The Department and its bureaus also conduct building drills and emergency exercises, most recently the Pinnacle 07 project, to improve response and recovery capabilities. "These exercises are invaluable in training us to deal with unexpected crises, no matter what form they might take," Kempthorne said.

More information on Interior's Health and Safety programs is available at <http://safetynet.smis.doi.gov/>. Emergency management and security information is available at <http://www.doi.gov/emergency>

Relevant Web Site:

- [DOI Website](#)