

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
MINERALS MANAGEMENT SERVICE
GULF OF MEXICO OCS REGION**

NTL No. 2002-G14

Effective Date: November 15, 2002

**NOTICE TO LESSEES AND OPERATORS OF FEDERAL OIL, GAS, AND SULPHUR
LEASES IN THE OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF, GULF OF MEXICO OCS REGION**

Vessel Strike Avoidance and Injured/Dead Protected Species Reporting

The Minerals Management Service (MMS) is issuing this Notice to Lessees and Operators (NTL), pursuant to 30 CFR 250.103, 30 CFR 250.203(o) and 30 CFR 250.204(s) to explain how you must implement measures to minimize the risk of vessel strikes to protected species and report observations of injured or dead protected species. This NTL applies to all existing and future oil and gas operations in the Gulf of Mexico OCS.

Background

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries has determined that collisions with OCS support/service vessels could injure or kill protected species (e.g. sperm whales and sea turtles) in the Gulf of Mexico OCS while engaged in supporting oil and gas industry activities. The NOAA Fisheries recently issued Biological Opinions (i.e. Lease Sales 181 and 184) to the MMS concerning lease sale actions that require that MMS develop, with NOAA Fisheries, a program to train observers in order to minimize the potential for vessel strikes. This Observer Training and Reporting Network Program will include provisions for observers to report sightings and/or any "takes" of protected species. The GOMR will update this NTL after it develops this program with NOAA Fisheries. In the interim, you must implement the following measures to avoid striking protected species and begin reporting injured or dead protected species.

Protected Species Identification Training and Vessel Strike Avoidance

While the MMS and NOAA Fisheries are developing the Observer Training and Reporting Network Program, vessel crews must use a Gulf of Mexico reference guide that includes and helps identify the 28 species of whales and dolphins, 5 species of sea turtles and the single species of manatee that might be encountered in the Gulf of Mexico OCS. One example of an appropriate field guide is Guide to Marine Mammals & Turtles of the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico by Kate Wynne and Malia Schwartz. Vessel operators and crews must maintain a vigilant watch for marine protected species and slow down or stop their vessel to avoid striking protected species.

Injured/Dead Protected Species Reporting

You must report sightings of any injured or dead protected species immediately to the MMS Protected Species Biologists by telephone at (504) 736-2766 or (504) 736-2877, regardless of whether the injury or death is caused by your vessel. Reports should include the location of the injured or dead animal, as well as whether the injury or death may have resulted from a collision with your vessel. The MMS will forward this information to the appropriate stranding network coordinators. If oil and gas industry activity is responsible for the injury or death, the responsible parties should remain available to assist the respective salvage and stranding network as needed.

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) Statement

The PRA (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) requires us to inform you that we collect the information described in this NTL to ensure that you conduct operations in a manner that will not jeopardize threatened or endangered species. We protect all proprietary information submitted according to the Freedom of Information Act and 30 CFR 250.196. An agency may not conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Control Number. You are not obligated to respond until the OMB has approved this collection of information. We are requesting OMB approval under emergency processing and approval is pending for the "injured or dead protected species observation and reporting" requirements. We estimate the hour burden to be one-half hour per report. Direct comments regarding the burden or any other aspect of this information collection to the Information Collection Clearance Officer, Mail Stop 4230, Minerals Management Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20240.

In addition, this NTL refers to information collection requirements under 30 CFR 250. Subpart B. OMB has approved 110 of them
URL: <http://www.ocsbbs.com/ntls/ntl02-g14.asp>

information collection requirements in these regulations and assigned OMB control number 1010-0049.

Contact

Please contact Ms. Carol Roden at (504) 736-2877 if you have any questions regarding this NTL.

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