



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **MMS Regional Office Operations Return to New Orleans; Commitment to Stay in the Area**

NEW ORLEANS - The Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service reopened its Gulf of Mexico Regional Office at 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard in New Orleans. "After two months of operating with a reduced staff in Houston, we are happy to have all our employees back at work, and the majority back in the Elmwood space," stated MMS Director Johnnie Burton. "Despite the temporary loss of offices housing more than 600 employees, we moved aggressively to resume full operations."

Because of the extensive damage sustained by the regional office during Hurricane Katrina, employees were prevented from returning to work. A temporary office with a contingency of employees was established in Houston.

Director Burton noted that "MMS is committed to stay in the New Orleans area and contribute to the economic revival of the area. We are working to secure a new 10-year lease for the Elmwood building and are working with the property owner to update the building as part of the repairs."

As of October 28<sup>th</sup>, all employees reported for duty, with about 350 occupying the first five floors of the Elmwood Towers and a small contingent in a neighboring building; and about another 150 remaining in Houston until the other five, more heavily damaged, floors are repaired. About 100 district employees have continued to work in the district offices along the Gulf Coast despite Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Lake Charles district office was temporarily closed because of Hurricane Rita but reopened with full operations on October 24<sup>th</sup>.

"The safety of MMS employees was a major concern for the agency," said Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Chris Oynes. "Most of the Gulf Regional employees who work in New Orleans live in the areas that were hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina. Although all of our

employees escaped the powerful storm without serious injury, many of them lost their homes completely or their homes suffered major damage.”

The Elmwood Towers site is open to the public for the adjudication of leases, review of plans, issuance of permits, evaluation of resources, and environmental research and studies as part of the daily operations. In addition, a small group of employees located in Covington, Louisiana, are responsible for accurate measurement of oil and gas production.

Oynes and his staff, however, were not part of the move to New Orleans. The day-to-day operations for the Regional Director’s office will remain in Houston until all repairs to the New Orleans facilities are complete. The management oversight of field operations and structural engineering support and the management oversight for production, including suspensions and unitization, will also remain in Houston.

The MMS Gulf of Mexico Regional Office has been located in the New Orleans metropolitan area since the agency was created in 1982, and has been housed at the Elmwood Towers building since 1986. “The return of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Office to New Orleans is a clear indication of the Federal Government’s commitment to the rebuilding of the metropolitan area,” said Director Burton.

MMS, part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, oversees 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf, managing offshore energy and minerals while protecting the human, marine, and coastal environments. The OCS provides 30 percent of oil and 21 percent of natural gas produced domestically, as well as sand used for coastal restoration. MMS collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands, and contributes to the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other special use funds, with Fiscal Year 2004 disbursements of about \$8 billion and more than \$143 billion since 1982.

**MMS Main Website: [www.mms.gov](http://www.mms.gov)**  
**Gulf of Mexico Website: [www.gomr.mms.gov](http://www.gomr.mms.gov)**

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