



OVERVIEW

The Rigs-to-Reefs (R2R) Program within the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Environmental Compliance Program focuses on coordinating and facilitating the conversion of appropriately decommissioned oil and gas platforms from operators to a designated state artificial reef program.

BACKGROUND

Following the installation of offshore oil and gas platforms, the structures provided new opportunities for numerous marine species throughout the water column. Often diverse biological communities developed.

Throughout the 1970s, fishermen, divers, and coastal state representatives expressed concerns about the removal of structures that had become heavily populated with marine life.

Increased use of offshore platforms led to widespread support for effective artificial reef development by coastal states and prompted Congress to sign the National Fishing Enhancement Act in 1984.

The Act recognized the value of artificial and natural reef habitat and established national standards for reef development. The National Artificial Reef Plan and a permitting system for the construction of artificial reefs resulted from this legislation.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM ADVANCES BSEE'S MISSION TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH VIGOROUS REGULATORY OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT.



BSEE RIGS-TO-REEFS PROGRAM

BSEE is responsible for permitting the installation and eventual removal of energy-related facilities on the federal Outer Continental Shelf. When an OCS lease expires or operations cease, companies are obligated to properly decommission and remove their facilities - and clear the seabed of obstructions.

In response to concerns from coastal states, regarding the loss of marine habitat from the removal of oil and gas platforms, BSEE adopted a National Rigs-to-Reefs Policy. The R2R policy states that operators must adhere to the regulatory requirements for decommissioning of oil and gas facilities. In some cases, a departure from the requirement to completely remove a structure may be granted to operators by the submission of a reefing proposal to BSEE and a state Artificial Reef Program.

BSEE performs comprehensive reviews of proposals, and coordinates with the state and operator to confirm all requirements are met. Only when a proposal meets BSEE engineering, environmental, and policy standards, and a US Army Corps of Engineers reef-building permit is acquired, is the operator granted approval to convert a structure for into an artificial reef.



The three methods generally used for removing and “reefing” a retired structure are:

1. **Partial Removal:** The top portion of the structure is severed at a permitted navigational depth, typically 85-feet deep, and placed on the seafloor next to the base of the remaining structure. This method generally does not use explosives.
2. **Tow-and-Place:** The structure is detached from the seafloor, either using explosives or mechanical cutting techniques, and then towed to the selected reef for deployment.
3. **Topple-in-Place:** The structure is detached from the seafloor, either using explosives or mechanical cutting techniques, and then toppled onto its side.

Upon completion of decommissioning and reefing of the structure, the operator submits a removal report that includes a reef deployment survey and documentation of their offshore activities.

BSEE reviews the report for compliance with the reefing plan, applicable regulations, and other requirements, such as the state accepting the title and liability for the reefed structure.

BENEFITS OF RIGS-TO-REEFS

As of 2021, more than 600 platforms have been converted to permanent artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico.

- Platforms converted to artificial reef continue to provide hard substrate that creates habitat and shelter for a rich diversity of marine life.
- A typical eight-leg structure provides a home for 12,000 to 14,000 fish, according to a study by the Coastal Marine Institute.
- A typical four-leg structure provides two to three acres of habitat for hundreds of marine species.

Rigs-to-Reefs is a cooperation among coastal states, BSEE, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and other federal agencies.

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, established in 2011, is a U.S. Department of the Interior agency. BSEE promotes worker safety, environmental protection and conservation of resources through regulatory oversight and enforcement of the offshore energy industry on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf.