

## OVERVIEW

The Water Quality Program within the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Environmental Compliance Program centers on monitoring, enforcing, and improving the offshore energy industry's compliance with water quality standards, pollution prevention and control standards, and pollution prevention regulations. Its goal is to protect coastal and marine waters.

## BACKGROUND

Coastal and marine water quality on the federal Outer Continental Shelf can be impacted by discharges during all phases of offshore energy exploration, development, production, and decommissioning operations.

These activities can impact water quality primarily through spills and discharges of pollutants to marine waters. Water pollutants include produced water, sand, drilling fluids and cuttings, manufactured or produced hydrocarbons, chemicals, sanitary wastes, and deck drainage. Rainwater, fresh water, or sea water mixed with any of these constituents is also considered a pollutant.

These discharges to waters of the United States require permitting by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act and its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. The CWA is the principal law governing pollution control and water quality of the nation's waterways and is primarily overseen by EPA and the U.S. Coast Guard. It establishes conditions and permitting for discharges of pollutants into the waters of the U.S.

The three broad categories of pollutants are:

1. **Conventional** pollutants are contained in sanitary wastes including fecal coliform, total suspended solids, biochemical oxygen demand, pH, and oil and grease.
2. **Toxic** pollutants are pollutants that, upon exposure, ingestion, inhalation, or assimilation into any organism, will cause death, disease,



*ECP advances the BSEE mission to protect the environment through vigorous regulatory oversight and enforcement.*

behavioral abnormalities, cancer, genetic mutations, physiological malfunctions, or physical deformations in organisms or their offspring.

3. **Non-conventional** pollutants are all other pollutants including chemical oxygen demand, total organic carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus.

The level of required discharge control is dependent on the category of the pollutant. When the water in our ocean becomes polluted, it can endanger wildlife, make our drinking water unsafe, and threaten the waters where we swim and fish.

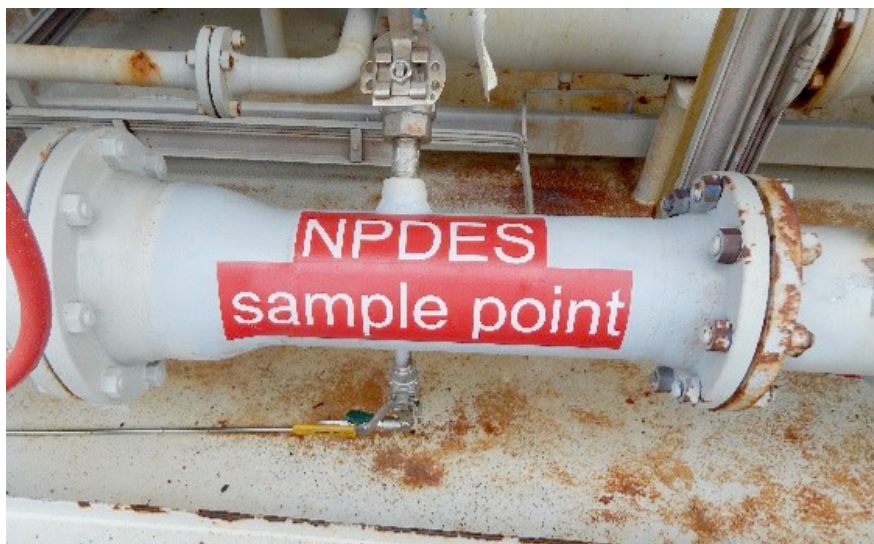
## BSEE WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

The fate of these pollutants in the environment, as well as their acute and chronic toxic effects on marine life, are key concerns for BSEE. BSEE's Water Quality Program works to protect coastal and marine waters by:

- Coordinating with the EPA on NPDES permit issues and safe drinking water.
- Coordinating with the USCG on: general pollution prevention; the Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships; oil fingerprinting; and safe drinking water.
- Coordinating with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to provide feedback on research and water quality analysis needs based on compliance verification and mitigation assessment findings and issues.
- Coordinating with BSEE regional and district field operations offices that issue permits for drilling, workover/completion, production operations, and other areas dealing with water quality related matters.
- Conducting field compliance verification and mitigation assessment through offshore site visits.
- Enforcing non-compliance and ensuring effective corrective action requirements.

ECP engineers, scientists, and other environmental specialists coordinate with their BOEM and EPA counterparts on NPDES permits. Additionally, ECP staff conduct field inspections on behalf of EPA to ensure that OCS facilities and mobile offshore drilling units are discharging to marine waters in compliance with the associated NPDES permit.

The Water Quality Program also reviews and tracks pollution reports received from various sources, including EPA's 24-hour NPDES non-compliance reports and the USCG's National Response Center pollution reports. Any verified pollution report deemed non-compliant is promptly referred for enforcement action as appropriate.



*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.*

