



OVERVIEW

The Air Quality Program within the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's Environmental Compliance Program focuses on monitoring, verifying, improving, and enforcing industry's compliance with environmental standards during Outer Continental Shelf operations.

BACKGROUND

The installation and operation of offshore energy production facilities creates regulated emissions that can have adverse effects on people and the environment.

Fugitive emissions of methane and volatile organic compounds can leak from oil and gas infrastructure throughout the process of natural gas and oil extraction, processing and transport. The flaring of natural gas, which is necessary to safely produce oil and gas, results in the emissions of carbon dioxide and sulfur and nitrogen oxides. Diesel engines and other power generating units on facilities can also emit CO₂, volatile organic compounds, and sulfur and nitrogen oxides.

The Outer Continental Shelf Land Act gives authority to the Department of the Interior to address Outer Continental Shelf air emissions. It directs the Secretary of the Interior to administer regulations for compliance with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards pursuant to the Clean Air Act, to the extent that authorized activities do not significantly affect the air quality of any state.

BSEE's Air Quality Program works in coordination with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to provide environmental oversight in areas where the Interior Department has authority to regulate air emissions from offshore oil and gas operations. Those areas include the Western and Central Gulf of Mexico OCS, West of 87.5 longitude, and the Alaska OCS Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. The Environmental Protection Agency retains jurisdiction over air emission sources in all other federal waters.



Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



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One of the critical areas BSEE's Air Quality Program protects is the Breton National Wildlife Refuge. Consisting of a crescent sweep of low islands located in Breton Sound off the southeast coast of Louisiana, the refuge contains a rare ecosystem that is protected by the Clean Air Act* as a Federal Class I Air Quality Area.

* The Clean Air Act gives class 1 areas special air quality and visibility protection, such as to national parks, wilderness areas, monuments, and other areas of special national and cultural significance.

BSEE AIR QUALITY PROGRAM

Air quality environmental engineers working in ECP's Air Quality Program verify compliance and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations pertaining to air quality. They also ensure that facilities operating on the OCS are in compliance with BOEM-approved plans and related conditions of approval for air emissions.

The Air Quality Program conducts field inspections of emission sources on offshore platforms that have the potential to emit regulated air pollutants as defined in the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The risk-based inspections of both permanent and temporary activities conducted on facilities operating on the OCS include the evaluation of:

- Drilling operations.
- Production equipment.
- Emission reduction controls.
- Equipment stack tests.
- Other associated potential sources of air pollution.

In addition to field inspections, BSEE air quality environmental engineers review BOEM-mandated monitoring and reporting of air emission sources for compliance with approved plan emission limits and other applicable conditions.

Operations found to be in violation of applicable air quality regulations, or BOEM plan conditions, receive a notice known as an Incident of Noncompliance. This is one of the enforcement actions employed by the BSEE Air Quality Program to bring potential violators into compliance. If deemed necessary, the Air Quality Program can also recommend further corrective action to assist operators with regaining compliance.

BSEE's Air Quality Program also collaborates with BOEM, other federal partners and states to provide assistance on environmental reviews, regulatory updates, and environmental studies that support safe operations on the federal OCS.

Some of these initiatives include coordination with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Science Foundation's Interagency Council of Meteorological Services to tackle meteorological gaps in the community through interagency workshops and working groups. Also, the BSEE Air Quality Program is an active participant in environmental studies on climate initiatives in the Gulf of Mexico with BOEM and EPA.

Presently, members of BSEE's Air Quality Program partner with NOAA, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Aeronautics and Space Administration and EPA to conduct studies (pilot surveys) of the application and feasibility of greenhouse gas emissions monitoring activities in the Outer Continental Shelf.

For additional information, please visit the BSEE Air Quality Program webpage, or contact us at the following email address: AirQualityCompliance@bsee.gov.



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.