

Summary: Offshore Company Falsified Site Clearance Certification

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The OIG investigated allegations that a company submitted false documentation to the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) regarding the final site clearance of offshore production platforms located in the Gulf of Mexico. Site clearance, as mandated by 30 C.F.R. § 250.1703, requires clearance of the seafloor of all obstructions created by the lease, pipeline right-of-way, or right-of-use and easement operations. The same regulations require that all decommissioning activities are conducted in a manner that is safe, does not unreasonably interfere with other uses of the Outer Continental Shelf, and do not cause undue or serious harm or damage to the human, marine, or coastal environment.

We found that, in September 2017, the company submitted a false site clearance verification to BSEE claiming the seafloor was cleared of obstructions when it was not. The company had hired another entity to decommission the site, and that other entity in turn hired a subcontractor to clean remaining obstructive seabed debris and verify that the site had been cleared. The subcontractor reported the decommissioned platform site was clear of seafloor obstructions on August 19, 2017, and subsequently passed the certification to the company. After the company submitted the site clearance verification to BSEE, however, a commercial fisherman's net snagged debris from the platform site while trawling for shrimp on three occasions in September 2017.

In May 2018, BSEE's Office of Environmental Compliance (OEC) inspected the site and observed several large structural pieces of the platform and pieces of equipment remaining on the seabed along with several dozen "can holes" within the minimum trawl radius required for site clearance. All of these obstructions should have been removed as part of the site clearance process. BSEE also identified other information supporting the conclusion that the site clearance verification prepared by the subcontractor was false.

As the lessee, the company had overall responsibility for the completion of the site clearance. After receiving an Incident of Non-Compliance, the company, through a new site clearance contractor, remediated the site. BSEE independently confirmed that the company complied with the Incident of Non-compliance and remediated the site as required.

We referred our findings to the U.S. Department of Justice, which declined to pursue the matter.

This is a summary of an investigative report we issued to the BSEE Director.

