

Summary: Investigation of Falsified Safety Test on an Offshore Drilling Rig

Report Date: June 12, 2014

OIG initiated an investigation after receiving information from the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's (BSEE) Office of Safety Management that a safety test conducted in June 2012 aboard a drilling rig operating in the Gulf of Mexico had been falsified.

During a routine inspection, BSEE inspectors found suspicious test documentation for a blowout preventer (BOP) and issued two incident-of-noncompliance citations to the rig operator. BSEE subsequently requested further review by our Energy Investigations Unit.

A BOP is a critical safety device designed to quickly shut in a well if something goes wrong, thereby protecting the platform, its workers, and the environment from an uncontrolled release of oil and gas. Federal regulations require well operators to test BOP equipment frequently and maintain documentation of the testing. The testing equipment includes a recording device that documents test results on a circular chart. Manipulating the recording device, sometimes called "spinning the chart," is strictly forbidden under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act because it makes it impossible to confirm that the BOP was operating safely and in compliance with BSEE operating standards.

The testing in question was performed by Sean Granger, an employee of Pioneer Energy Services, Inc. We found that Granger manipulated the test recording device by hand to compensate for poorly functioning testing equipment. We did not find a pattern of similar conduct by other Pioneer employees, or by employees of the operator assigned to the offshore lease.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana accepted the case for prosecution. In November 2014, Granger pleaded guilty to violating the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act by knowingly tampering with the circular chart recorder. In March 2015, Granger was sentenced to 3 years of probation and ordered to pay a \$3,000 fine and a \$100 special assessment.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued internally to the U.S. Department of the Interior. This summary was posted to the web on August 17, 2015.

