

Chapter 1 – Introduction



The Surface Operating Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development (commonly referred to as The Gold Book) was developed to assist operators by providing information on the requirements for obtaining permit approval and conducting environmentally responsible oil and gas operations on Federal lands and on private surface over Federal minerals. Operations include exploration, production, reclamation, associated rights-of-way (ROWs), and Special Use Authorizations (SUAs).

The Gold Book provides operators with a combination of guidance and standards for ensuring compliance with agency policies and operating requirements, such as those found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 43 CFR 3000 and 36 CFR 228 Subpart E; Onshore Oil and Gas Orders (Onshore Orders); and Notices to Lessees (NTLs). Agency field offices and websites can provide more detailed discussions of specific procedures and requirements and copies of regulations, Onshore Orders, Notices to Lessees, and other agency policies currently in effect.

Every operation authorized under a Federal oil and gas lease should conform to USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USDA Forest Service (FS), or other agency standards and reflect relevant, site-specific conditions. Knowledge of BLM resource management plans (RMPs) and FS land and resource management plans, as well as agency operational standards, procedures, and environmental protection requirements will help operators meet those standards.

Surface Management Agency

Federal oil and gas lease surface operations are managed by the BLM in cooperation with the

appropriate Federal surface management agency or non-Federal surface owner. On National Forest System (NFS) lands, the FS has approval authority for the surface use portion of Federal oil and gas operations and for appeals related to FS decisions and approvals. Early coordination with the BLM and the appropriate surface management agency or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office is encouraged as procedures and requirements vary by agency or reservation. Appendix 1 provides a map showing BLM State Offices and Regional FS Offices with addresses and telephone numbers.

Filing Plans

Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 1 describes the procedure for filing either an *Application for Permit to Drill or Reenter* (APD), Form 3160-3, or a *Notice of Staking* (NOS) followed by an APD (Appendix 2 – Forms and Formats for Required Information). Early contact and discussions with the BLM and the surface management agency are highly encouraged and will expedite approval of the APD. It is recommended that this contact be made **prior** to the commitment of dates, equipment, access route acquisition, and preparation of the APD.

The operator is required to file the complete APD package for all operations, including those on National Forest System lands, with the appropriate BLM office. The completed APD package must include APD Form 3160-3, a well plat, a Drilling Plan, a Surface Use Plan of Operations (SUPO), evidence of bond coverage, and operator certification in accordance with the requirements of Onshore Order No. 1. Drilling and related surface-disturbing operations are not allowed without an approved APD. Requests for changes to an approved APD must be submitted to the BLM for prior approval on a Sundry Notice (SN) (Form 3160-5). Operators are encouraged to file APDs, Sundry Notices, and Well Completion Reports (Form 3160-4) through the BLM's electronic filing system. Contact any BLM State or Field Office for further information on electronic filing options.

Environmental Analysis

The BLM, and if applicable, the FS, is responsible for ensuring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Upon receipt of a complete APD or formal proposal that encompasses multiple wells in a specific area, the BLM, the surface management agency, or the agency's or operator's environmental contractor will conduct an environmental analysis and prepare an environmental document in conformance with the requirements of NEPA and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Regardless of which agency, entity, or individual prepares the environmental analysis document, the BLM (and FS, for actions on National Forest System lands) must concur with the content prior to issuing a decision document. In the case of National Forest System lands, where the environmental analysis is conducted jointly with the BLM, each agency will issue its own decision. The extent of the environmental analysis process and the time frame for issuance of a decision will depend upon the complexity of the proposed action and resulting analysis, the significance of the environmental effects disclosed, and the completion of appropriate consultation processes.

Onsite Inspection

Before approval of the APD, an onsite inspection will be conducted with the operator to further

identify site-specific resource protection concerns and requirements. Prior to, or in conjunction with, the onsite inspection, the surface management agency will advise the operator if any special inventories or studies are required, such as for cultural resources or threatened and endangered species.

Interim and Final Reclamation

The objective of reclamation in the short term is to provide site stability and basic resource productivity. The final goal of reclamation is to restore the character of the land and water to its pre-disturbance condition. The operator is responsible for completing the reclamation activities necessary to achieve the short-term objective, and upon abandonment, establishing the conditions on the site so that no impediment exists that would prevent achieving the final goal.

To reduce areas of disturbance not needed for long-term operations, interim reclamation will be initiated for areas such as active well and facility locations, pipelines, and roads when well completion operations or facility installation operations are concluded. All surface disturbances associated with plugged wells and facility abandonment must be reclaimed after operations have concluded. The final abandonment notice (FAN), including final reclamation, will not be approved by the BLM until reclamation work is determined to be successful by the BLM in consultation with the surface management agency or surface owner.

Environmental Best Management Practices

Environmental Best Management Practices (BMPs) are state-of-the-art mitigation measures designed to provide for safe and efficient operations while minimizing undesirable impacts to the environment. Proper planning and consultation among the operator, surface management agency, and non-Federal surface owner, and the proactive incorporation of environmental Best Management Practices into the APD Surface Use Plan of Operations by the operator, will typically result in a more efficient APD and environmental review



Best Management Practices in this photograph include a two-track, primitive road with full interim reclamation of the road and well pad; flowlines and electrical lines buried deep within the road; remote monitoring to reduce traffic to the well; a submersible pump; and a small well box painted to blend in with the background.

process, increased operating efficiency, reduced long-term operating costs, reduced final reclamation needs, and less impact to the environment.

Stipulations and Conditions of Approval

Constraints that are consistent with the rights granted by the lease may be imposed on the location of access roads, well sites, and facility sites or the timing of geophysical exploration, well drilling, or other operations. Constraints may result from lease stipulations, the surface management agency's review and environmental analysis of the proposed operations, Notices to Lessees, Onshore Orders, or regulations. When consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Tribe, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is required, the time needed for an APD review may be extended and result in additional constraints on operations.

Other Federal, Tribal, State, or Local Permits or Authorizations

A permit, right-of-way, or other authorization from the BLM or surface management agency will be required unless otherwise exempted by Onshore Order or Notice to Lessee for on-lease uses, such as disposal of produced water, authorization for use of sand or gravel, and gas flaring. Off-lease uses, such as facilities and roads, will require a permit, right-of-way, or other authorization from the surface management agency. All facilities located on the lease, but owned by parties other than the operator, will require authorization from the surface management agency.

BLM approval of an APD does not relieve the operator from obtaining any other authorizations required for drilling or subsequent operations. This includes any requirements of other Federal, Tribal, State, or local authorities.

