



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

May 3, 2010

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

Inspector General Mary L. Kendall
Acting Inspector General
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, District of Columbia 20240

Dear Inspector General Kendall:

In the wake of the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, questions have arisen over Mineral Management Service (MMS) regulations regarding reliable back-up systems to cap underwater wells.

More specifically, MMS allowed oil rigs not to have audio control devices capable of remotely activating a wellhead's blowout preventer. At least two other major countries that permit offshore drilling require rigs to carry such devices. Also, newly published accounts indicate regulators didn't act on other concerns that oil-drilling safety equipment may not function in a deep-water environment.

In light of the recent events, I am asking you to review the process by which MMS reviewed and finalized 30 CFR §250.515 and all other regulations relevant to blowout preventers and well controls. I ask that you determine in your investigation the extent to which the oil and natural gas industry exercised influence in the agency's rulemaking process.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. If you have any questions, please contact Susie Perez Quinn in my office at (202) 224-5274.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson