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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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energycommerce.house.gov

July 15, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Committee on Energy and Commerce is investigating the April 20, 2010, explosion at the Deepwater Horizon oil drilling rig, and the resulting oil spill's impact. According to an *Associated Press* (AP) investigation publicized last week, there are more than 27,000 abandoned oil and gas wells in the Gulf of Mexico. More troubling, according to the AP report, there are 3,500 wells that are temporarily abandoned, including more than 1,000 wells that have been in this state for more than 10 years. These wells could pose an additional danger to the Gulf Coast environment and economy.

To assist the Committee in its ongoing investigation, we request that you respond, by July 19, 2010, to the following questions and requests for information:

1. Please provide a list of the companies that leased the 3,500 temporarily abandoned wells in the Gulf of Mexico and the dates those wells were abandoned.
2. Please provide a list of the companies that leased the more than 1,000 wells that have been temporarily abandoned for more than 10 years.
3. What actions is the Interior Department taking to require companies that have temporarily abandoned wells to permanently seal them? What fines or penalties are available against a leaseholder that fails to permanently seal a temporarily abandoned well within the required time? Against which companies has the Department levied fines or penalties for such violations?

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4. Is the Interior Department aware of any changes in pressure in any of the 3,500 wells that have been temporarily abandoned or any of the more than 1,000 that have been temporarily abandoned for more than 10 years?
5. Does the Interior Department require companies that have temporarily abandoned wells to inspect the wells? If so, how often do these inspections occur? How does the Interior Department confirm that companies have complied with this requirement?
6. Does the Interior Department require companies that have permanently abandoned wells to inspect the wells? If so, how often do companies complete these inspections? How does the Interior Department confirm that companies have complied with this requirement?
7. Have any leaks been detected from any of the 3,500 temporarily abandoned wells or any of the permanently abandoned wells in the Gulf? If so, when were those leaks detected, what was the size of the leaks, and what actions were taken to stop the leaks?
8. Have any leaks been detected from any permanently abandoned wells in the Gulf of Mexico? If so, when were those leaks detected, what was the size of the leaks, and what actions were taken to stop the leaks?

In addition, we request that you provide to the Committee all documents that assess the risks of leaks from temporarily or permanently abandoned wells.

Please produce the requested documents to the Committee by August 3, 2010. An attachment to this letter provides additional information on how to respond to the Committee's request. If you have questions regarding this request, please contact Molly Gaston or Michal Freedhoff of the Committee staff at (202) 226-2424.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Chairman



Edward J. Markey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

Attachment

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cc: The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member

The Honorable Fred Upton
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Environment