



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh Submits Comments Opposing Plans to Weaken Offshore Drilling Regulations *Regulations Established to Prevent Future Catastrophic Events*

BALTIMORE, MD (August 7, 2018) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today led a coalition of 10 attorneys general in submitting [comments](#) opposing the federal Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement’s (BSEE) plans to significantly revise the Oil and Gas and Sulfur Operations on the Outer Continental Shelf – Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control regulations, often called the “Well Control Rule.”

The Well Control Rule was finalized just two years ago, in the wake of the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico. It included design and operational requirements for equipment used in offshore drilling, as well as more robust inspection, verification, and reporting requirements. Already, though, BSEE has proposed to reduce or eliminate critical aspects of the Well Control Rule because, in BSEE’s view, they “unnecessarily burden the development of domestic energy resources” and “are not needed to ensure safe and responsible development” of offshore resources.

“Weakening safety regulations aimed at preventing another Deepwater Horizon disaster is dangerous and irresponsible,” said Attorney General Frosh. “It is bad enough that the Trump Administration proposes to allow oil drilling near the Chesapeake Bay and our beaches. Reducing safety standards at the same time risks lives and endangers the natural resources we have struggled to protect.”

The Well Control Rule resulted from a four-year process of investigations, studies, and stakeholder input, with detailed identification of and responses to public comments. Input on the proposed rollback, by contrast, has come from a single public forum held in September 2017, along with various unidentified “discussions” and “questions from operators.” For some provisions that BSEE proposes to roll back, moreover, the compliance date has not yet even arrived.

The rollback of the Well Control Rule regulations is even more alarming as the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has proposed vastly expanding offshore and oil leasing to include areas where oil or gas activities are non-existent today. Thus, BSEE’s proposal to weaken precautions meant to prevent spills comes at the same time as it proposes to bring offshore drilling to areas least equipped to respond to those spills.

The attorneys general note in their letter that, *“By dramatically increasing the volume of oil and gas leasing, BOEM will dramatically increase the number of locations at risk of spills, blowouts, and their accompanying consequences for environmental and human health. Easing safety precautions now is analogous to taping over the mirrors and unbuckling one’s seatbelt just before getting on the highway.”*

The Deepwater Horizon disaster occurred in April 2010 and led to the loss of 11 lives and a release of 134 million gallons of oil, covering 43,300 square miles of the gulf of Mexico, causing extensive damage to 1,300 miles of shoreline across the Gulf Coast states. The environmental and socioeconomic harms were staggering—with widespread and severe effects on the entire Gulf economy, including the drilling, commercial fishing, recreation, and tourism industries, not to mention significant harm to wildlife and wetlands.

Joining Maryland in signing the comment letter are attorneys general from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington.