



OVERVIEW

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement protects the environment across 1.7 billion acres of the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf. One aspect of that protection is BSEE's program to reduce the oil and gas industry's contribution to marine debris.

The Marine Debris Program within BSEE's Environmental Compliance Program focuses on monitoring, verifying, improving, and enforcing industry's compliance with environmental standards during offshore operations.

BACKGROUND

Marine debris consists of any items in oceans and coastal waters that people lose or purposely discard. Inorganic items such as metals and glass, and synthetic materials such as plastics persist for very long durations and have become a significant problem in our oceans.

Plastics are some of the most durable man-made materials and can persist for centuries in the marine environment. Glass is estimated to take up to a million years to decompose.

Plastics pose a unique problem because they do not "mineralize," or break down into their elemental parts, rather they retain their basic structure as plastic and continue to break into progressively smaller pieces, which can eventually become the size of marine plankton.

Plastics also adsorb chemicals from surrounding waters so that they concentrate toxins up to 100 times more than the seawater itself. Scientists find these micro-plastics in the bellies of fish and even in marine larvae, thus introducing plastics and toxins into the food chain.

Marine debris comes from many sources; about 80% is from land sources and only about 2% is from offshore oil and gas. Even though only 2% of marine debris is traced to oil and gas sources offshore, BSEE continually strives to reduce this even more.



ECP advances the BSEE mission to protect the environment through vigorous regulatory oversight and enforcement.



BSEE MARINE DEBRIS PROGRAM

Marine ecologists in BSEE's ECP conduct a variety of reviews and inspections to ensure offshore energy companies comply with all required environmental laws, regulations, and protective mitigations.

The Marine Debris Program requires offshore energy companies to train offshore personnel annually in debris prevention and to certify their compliance each year. Offshore facilities with food preparation capabilities or overnight accommodations are required to post informative marine debris warning placards in strategic locations.

An important requirement for offshore marine debris prevention is for industry to secure moveable items by tying them to the structure or storing them in fixed containers and cabinets.

Moveable items, which could include buckets, pallets, bins, tanks, and anything else that could fall into the ocean, must also be labeled with the facility location name. At the end of a facility's useful term, decommissioning regulations require a thorough sweep of the surrounding seafloor to remove any accumulated debris.

BSEE marine ecologists conduct marine debris inspections offshore to confirm companies are following required practices. These inspections include reviewing the training records of personnel on the structure, confirming that marine debris warning placards are visible, and checking that loose items are labeled and secured.

In addition to visual inspections on offshore platforms and drill rigs, seafloor inspections are sometimes conducted to confirm proper cleanup during decommissioning work offshore. BSEE participates on the Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee and collaborates with agencies across the government on activities related to marine debris.

BSEE marine ecologists also coordinate with other regulators to provide feedback and adaptive management recommendations to improve the effectiveness of biological mitigations and regulations. Marine debris prevention is a critical component of BSEE's environmental stewardship mission.

For additional information please visit the BSEE Marine Debris Program webpage or contact us at: MarineDebris@bsee.gov.



The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, established in 2011, is a U.S. Department of the Interior agency. BSEE promotes worker safety, environmental protection and conservation of resources through regulatory oversight and enforcement of the offshore energy industry on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf.