

that we should not require testing VBRs on all sizes. The rationale was that the testing of VBRs on all sizes adds very little to increased safety availability in the BOP due to the redundancy in the stack, and that most failures will occur during the pressure test.

• *Comment on § 250.449 What additional BOP testing requirements must I comply with?* Mandatory pressure testing of the BOP system after landing is not justified considering the extremely low failure rate of BOP components and the fact that the physical act of running the stack imposes little to no stress on the functional components of the BOP system. After a successful stump test, MMS should require only a function test for the BOP stack once it is on bottom. Function testing after landing will ensure that all control circuits are operating properly. This minor revision has a potentially huge beneficial impact by saving lost rig time to the initial BOP pressure test.

Response: We did not revise this requirement as suggested. We believe that the initial pressure test of the BOP stack after landing on the well is critical to ensuring that it functions properly. The results from our 1999 research project on the reliability of deep water subsea BOP systems (Holand, 1999) support our belief. That research project examined data from 83 wells that were drilled using subsea BOP stacks in the deep water GOM. The majority of the wells were spudded during July 1, 1997, to May 1, 1998. The results showed that 15 components failed during the initial pressure tests after the BOP stack landed on the wellhead. Of those 15 failures, 10 were in the control systems and may have been discovered in a function test. However, five other failures occurred (two connectors, one annular preventer, one ram preventer, one choke and kill valve) that may not have been discovered without the initial pressure test. MMS will continue to require the initial pressure test after landing the subsea BOP stack.

• *Comment on § 250.456 What are the required safe drilling fluid program practices?* Paragraph (a) should not require circulating the well before starting out of the hole if you have lost circulation.

Response: MMS believes that pipe should not be pulled out of the hole until a loss circulation pill has been spotted and the well is under control. It

is recommended that the top part of the hole be circulated to ensure that the wellbore is clear of gas. Some loss of returns is acceptable while pulling out of the hole; however, excessive loss circulation would require remaining on bottom until the loss was controlled either with a pill or cement.

• *Comment on § 250.456 What are the required safe drilling fluid program practices?* Recommend that MMS eliminate the second sentence in paragraph (e) which says "You must circulate and condition the well, on or near-bottom, unless well or drilling-fluid conditions prevent running the drill pipe back to the bottom." The first sentence of this requirement which says you must take appropriate measures to control the well is sufficient to address this situation.

Response: We did not remove the second sentence of this paragraph because this is a safe drilling practice. However, the sentence in question does allow for not running drill pipe to bottom to circulate the well if conditions prevent it.

• *Comment on § 250.456 What are the required safe drilling fluid program practices?* Recommend that paragraph (f) allow the District Supervisor the discretion to not require the posting of the surface pressure at which the shoe would break down.

Response: We did not revise this paragraph. You may request a departure from this requirement in your APD submission to the District Supervisor.

• *Comment on § 250.456 What are the required safe drilling fluid program practices?* MMS should allow the District Supervisor the discretion to not require degassers in all situations (paragraph (g)).

Response: We did not revise this paragraph. You may request a departure from this requirement in your APD submission to the District Supervisor.

• *Comment on § 250.458 What quantities of drilling fluids are required?* The commenter prefers the current wording over the proposed wording.

Response: The new regulations use a more active style of writing versus the passive style used in the previous regulations. The requirements (and most of the words) are the same.

• *Comments on § 250.459 What are the safety requirements for drilling-fluid-handling areas?* The two drilling contractors and IADC commented that the requirement to classify drilling-

fluid-handling areas according to API RP 500, Recommended Practice for Classification of Locations for Electrical Installations at Petroleum Facilities, is in conflict with the 1998 MMS/USCG MOU as it relates to MODUs. The MOU assigns regulatory oversight of this subject matter to the USCG. USCG regulations at 46 CFR 108.170 and 108.187 clearly address these matters, as do the Classification Society requirements applicable to MODUs. Accordingly, the requirements in this section should not apply to MODUs.

Response: This is not a new requirement. The USCG is responsible for the inspection on this area for electrical requirements; it is classified due to a possible source for gas coming out of the cuttings. MMS inspects for gas detectors and tests them on a regular basis. If we see anything that does not meet the USCG's requirement, such as an exposed wire, then MMS would shut down operation and require that it be repaired. All drilling-fluid-handling areas are treated the same.

• *Comment on § 250.460 What are the requirements for well testing?* These requirements should not apply if a well test is conducted on a permanent production facility.

Response: Your projected plans for a well test on a permanent production facility must address all appropriate requirements. You may reference another document or plan if it addresses a specific requirement, such as the description of safety equipment.

• *Comment on § 250.465 When must I submit sundry notices to MMS?* An open hole sidetrack to go around junk in the hole and to continue drilling to the original approved APD should not require a sundry notice.

Response: All sidetracks require the submittal of a sundry notice, and the API number is incremented. This allows the logs to be tracked and handled correctly.

III. OOC Comments on Specific Sections

The following table contains the OOC's unedited comments on the proposed requirements for oil and gas drilling operations and our response to those comments. In this table, we have italicized words that OOC wanted added to the regulations and have bracketed words that the OOC wanted deleted from the regulations.