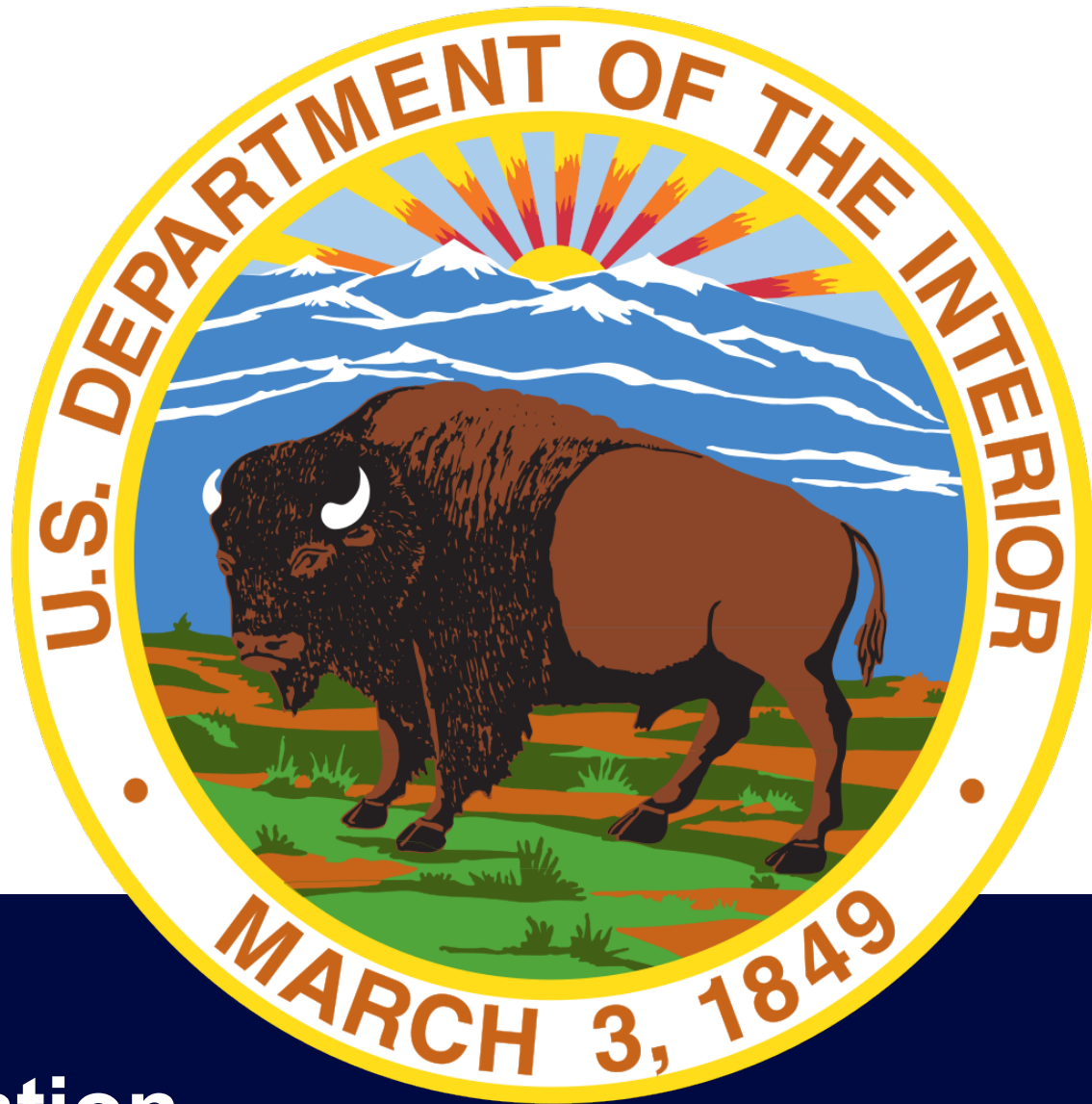




OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



Investigation

Safety Systems Bypass Causes Pollution Event in the Gulf of Mexico

This is a revised version of the report prepared for public release.



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REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

I. RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

We investigated allegations from the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) that in 2018, Fieldwood Energy, LLC (Fieldwood) bypassed multiple safety systems while operating the offshore platform Grand Isle 43AA (GI-43AA), resulting in a discharge of a pollutant into the Gulf of Mexico.

Fieldwood was an energy company that operated multiple offshore platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and produced oil and gas subject to Federal mineral leases and regulations. As an offshore operator, Fieldwood was required to comply with the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, 43 U.S.C. § 1331 – 1356c. The law required Fieldwood to properly test and maintain equipment aboard the platform including safety and filtration systems. BSEE enforces the law through routine inspections and is authorized to issue civil penalties to oil and gas companies for incidents of noncompliance. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for enforcing violations of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1319 and 1321, which requires companies that operate offshore oil and gas facilities located in areas within Federal jurisdiction to prevent water pollution. Furthermore, certain conduct that results in pollution and, therefore, violates the Clean Water Act may constitute a criminal act.

We found that Brandon Wall, a former Fieldwood Area Foreman, engaged in criminal conduct while aboard offshore platform GI-43AA, which experienced sand buildup problems with its filtration system. Wall instructed platform operators to keep the platform “flowing” instead of shutting in the platform to repair or replace the filtration system¹. Wall was aware that operators bypassed the platform’s safety systems, which would have automatically shut-in the platform for safety purposes. Operators on GI-43AA told us they knew that putting safety systems in bypass mode made the platform less safe and increased the risk of a pollution event. In January 2018, GI-43AA discharged oil and other hazardous substances into the Gulf of Mexico. Eventually, Wall informed BSEE about the discharge. A BSEE inspector was traveling to conduct an inspection at a different platform when BSEE received the report of a possible discharge at GI-43AA. When the BSEE inspector arrived at the GI-43AA platform, he reported seeing a sheen emanating from GI-43AA, further confirming that the platform had discharged oil and other hazardous substances.

We presented our findings to the Eastern District of Louisiana (EDLA) U.S. Attorney’s Office, who prosecuted this case. On June 14, 2022, Wall pled guilty to violations of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1319(c)(1)(A) and § 1321(b)(3), for Fieldwood’s negligent discharge of a pollutant into the Gulf of Mexico. Wall was sentenced on or about May 3, 2023, to 1 year of probation and ordered to pay a \$25 special assessment. We are providing this report to the Director of BSEE for any action deemed appropriate.

II. SUBJECT

Brandon Wall, former Area Foreman, Fieldwood Energy, LLC.

¹ “Shutting-in” refers to ceasing operations and stopping oil and gas production aboard a platform.



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