

Abstract



Understanding and Minimizing the Impacts of Offshore Drilling Discharges

Author: Andrew Glickman

New environmental regulations and higher expectations from partners and external stakeholders are driving the O&G industry to better manage the offshore discharge of drilling muds and cuttings. In some cases, these pressures have forced operations to stop the discharge. In other cases, the industry has had tremendous success demonstrating to regulators that properly managed discharges result in little impact to the marine environment. These stewardship efforts, particularly when performed in collaboration with local stakeholders, have led to regulations that continue to allow the discharge of drill cuttings.

How can our industry ensure that our discharges do not cause significant adverse effects, communicate this to regulators and other stakeholders?

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First, operators must apply an environmental assessment process that addresses concerns regarding the potential impacts of a drilling discharge. For projects in ecologically sensitive areas, those closer to shore, or large multi-well developments, proactive field data collection and sophisticated analyses may be necessary to better understand potential impacts.

Second, drilling operations that choose to discharge should only use drilling fluids that demonstrate low aquatic toxicity and high biodegradability.

Third, operations should have a comprehensive waste management plan in place that utilizes the latest cuttings cleaning technologies and continually monitors their effectiveness. By addressing these three elements, operators can demonstrate they are making sound and defensible decisions regarding the discharge of drilling muds and cuttings, and ensure that discharge is an option for drilling projects in the future.