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A report released on September 29 by the Interior Office of Inspector General (OIG) relates the shortcomings of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) policy to detect and deter illegal mineral or oil and gas drilling on federal lands.

The inspection was conducted due to the industry's increasing use of horizontal drilling. Horizontal well bores can extend for miles, allowing unauthorized harvesting of unleased federal minerals or federal minerals leased to another entity. Illegal drilling is also a threat to the environment, since drilling that does not comply with BLM standards increases the risk of hydrocarbons or hydraulic fracturing fluids being released into groundwater, especially in vulnerable areas like wetlands.

According to the report, BLM has no official method for discovering mineral trespassing and unauthorized drilling. As it is, BLM relies on tips from companies or the Interior Office of Natural Resources Revenue. Furthermore, the existing regulations aimed at illegal drilling are ineffective—one includes a fine of a mere \$5000, while the other requires unpermitted wells to be shut down completely. Finally, staff shortages and cumbersome procedures prevent the BLM from effectively monitoring and addressing unauthorized drilling.

The report includes recommendations on how to improve the situation, including that the agency review surveys collected by state oil and gas agencies, and report violations to the Office of the Solicitor or the OIG. The BLM has stated its intention to review the recommendations and strengthen its policies.

Sources: E&E News, Office of the Inspector General
