

House Democrats urge BLM to take action on illegal drilling

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Following the recent release of a report by the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General (OIG), four House Democrats sent a letter to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) encouraging it to strengthen its policies for preventing illegal drilling for federal mineral resources, which include oil and gas resources. The report, which we covered in a September news brief, found that BLM does not adequately deter illegal drilling for minerals on federal lands and has no official policy for discovering violations.

House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Peter DeFazio (D-WA), Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Ranking Member Rush Holt (D-NJ), and Representatives Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) and Jared Huffman (D-CA) signed the letter which identifies two key issues: trespass, or illegal productions of federal minerals, and drilling without approval. A combination of horizontal drilling practices that extend well bores for miles and patchwork land rights in many areas make it difficult to identify when companies produce minerals without authorization, whether intentional or not. Subsequently, illegal drilling creates safety and environmental concerns and does not allow for taxpayers to receive all tax revenue. The letter reiterates the importance of developing responses to illegal drilling and acknowledges Congress' obligation to provide funding to support these activities. In light of the report, BLM is reviewing OIG's recommendations and will work to "strengthen [its] policies and procedures."

Sources: E&E News, House Natural Resources Committee Minority Website

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