

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

July 9, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The Department of the Interior (DOI) manages oil and gas activities on offshore federal leases, including activities associated with thousands of wells, platforms, and miles of oil and gas pipelines on the Outer Continental Shelf. The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) within DOI is responsible for overseeing existing oil and gas pipeline operations as well as the decommissioning of old and unused pipelines.

We are concerned about the ability of DOI to ensure the integrity of older oil and gas pipeline infrastructure in federal offshore waters, and the increasing risk of leaks caused by hurricanes, corrosion, accidental damage, or other factors. Inspection, monitoring, and repair systems must remain a focus for both existing and proposed pipeline systems. BSEE sponsors research into developing a methodology for assessing the safety of existing offshore oil and gas pipelines as well as the design and installation of future offshore pipeline systems. This research is also necessary to better understand and respond to aging pipelines, including assessing the most feasible and environmentally sound means of decommissioning oil and gas pipelines located on the seafloor.

In view of these concerns, we request that the Government Accountability Office answer the following:

1. What is known about the condition of aging oil and gas pipelines on the ocean floors in the Gulf of Mexico, along the California coast, and the Arctic; and what are the risks to the environment from corroding pipelines and spills or serious leaks?
2. What is BSEE's responsibility for the safety of existing oil and gas pipelines and the design and installation of future oil and gas pipeline systems?
3. What sort of financial assurances from pipeline owners are held by DOI to ensure taxpayers are not responsible for paying the cost of offshore pipeline decommissioning? If the amount of financial assurances is inadequate, what is the financial risk to the taxpayer?

4. What are the challenges to maintaining safe offshore oil and gas pipeline systems and what does the research say about the need for improved inspection, monitoring, and/or repair of existing oil and gas pipelines as well as the decommissioning of old oil and gas pipelines offshore?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please contact the Committee staff at (202) 225-6065 if you have any questions regarding this request.

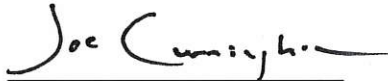
Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
House Natural Resources Committee



Alan S. Lowenthal
Chair
House Subcommittee on Energy
and Mineral Resources



Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress