



Onshore Oil & Gas Sector Guidance

Consultation overview, November 2015

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment and make it a better place for people and wildlife.

We operate at the place where environmental change has its greatest impact on people's lives. We reduce the risks to people and properties from flooding; make sure there is enough water for people and wildlife; protect and improve air, land and water quality and apply the environmental standards within which industry can operate.

Acting to reduce climate change and helping people and wildlife adapt to its consequences are at the heart of all that we do.

We cannot do this alone. We work closely with a wide range of partners including government, business, local authorities, other agencies, civil society groups and the communities we serve.

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Executive Summary

We are the environmental regulator for onshore oil and gas operations in England. Through effective regulation we help ensure that these operations are conducted in a way that protects people and the environment.

We are developing guidance which explains the environmental regulations that apply to operations to explore and extract onshore oil and gas in England and the permissions operators need to obtain. It includes activities with a technical connection to the exploration and extraction activities which could lead to emissions and pollution, such as:

- raw material storage and handling
- all aspects of waste management (prevention, recovery, safe disposal)
- systems to control and reduce emissions to land, air and water

The guidance does not cover underground coal gasification.

The guidance is for oil and gas companies, their consultants and other technical audiences like land use planners. It is not aimed at operators drilling exploratory boreholes for other purposes, including exploration for minerals other than oil and gas.

We think this consultation will be of interest to anyone working on or have an interest in the exploration and extraction of onshore oil and gas.

Please note that we are consulting on our **'approach and the standards we are proposing'** rather than on the style and format of the guidance which will be re-formatted following a GOV.UK editing review. We want to hear your thoughts, comments and opinion on the guidance.

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1. About this consultation

This document explains why we are consulting and what we are consulting you on. It is designed to help you understand and comment on the onshore oil & gas sector guidance.

1.1. Why are we consulting?

We do not currently have published guidance for onshore oil and gas operations and have therefore produced this guidance for the sector.

1.2. What are we consulting on?

This guidance is for oil and gas companies and their consultants setting out which environmental permits are needed for onshore oil and gas exploration and extraction operations in England. This guidance will help operators to understand how existing legislation applies to oil and gas exploration and extraction activities and what an operator needs to do to comply. It explains the permits an operator will need and, where relevant, the Best Available Techniques (BAT) that should be used to meet regulatory requirements.

This includes the following activities:

- Constructing your well pad
- Drilling exploratory wells
- Flow testing and well stimulation, including hydraulic fracturing
- Storing and handling crude oil
- Treatment of waste gases (including flaring)
- Handling, storage and disposal of produced waters and flowback fluid
- Managing extractive wastes
- Extraction of coal mine methane

Please note that we are consulting on our **'approach and the standards we are proposing'** rather than on the style and format of the guidance which will be re-formatted following a GOV.UK editing review.

1.3. We want your views.

We think this consultation will be of interest to anyone working on or have an interest in the exploration and extraction of onshore oil and gas. This includes operators and other businesses, trade associations, national and local government, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), other regulators, academic institutions, individuals and community groups with an interest in environmental issues.

We want to hear your thoughts, comments and opinion on the guidance. You will find the consultation questions in Section 2 of this document and information on how to respond in Section 3.

2. Consultation questions

We welcome your comments in response to the following questions.

Q1: The purpose of this guidance is to signpost the reader to the appropriate regulatory regimes for onshore oil and gas exploration and extraction. Do you feel the document fulfils this purpose?

Q2: Does the guidance clearly outline the Environment Agency permits that are needed for onshore oil and gas?

Q3: Does the guidance clearly outline the other Environment Agency permissions that are needed for onshore oil and gas?

Q4: Is there anything missing that you feel should be included in the guidance?

Q5: Please tell us if you have any other views or comments on the guidance that have not been covered by previous questions.

3. Responding to this consultation

3.1. Important dates

This consultation will start on 26 November 2015 and will run for a period of 14 weeks until 3 March 2016. This makes allowance for the Christmas holiday period.

3.2. How to respond

The consultation documents are available to view online at <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/portal/ho/ep/oog/guidance>. For a printed version of the consultation documents or response form please email your request to oilandgasconsultations@environment-agency.gov.uk. We would prefer you to respond online. This will enable you to manage your comments more effectively and at the same time it will help us to gather and summarise responses quickly and accurately.

However, if you would like to send your response by post, please send your completed response form to:

FAO Onshore Oil & Gas Programme

Environment Agency

Horizon House

Deanery Road

Bristol BS1 5AH

3.3. Publishing your consultation responses

Throughout the consultation we will make all comments (apart from personal information) publicly available on the consultation website. This includes comments received online, by email, post and by fax, unless you have specifically requested that your responses be kept confidential. Only names of organisations that respond and not individuals will be published.

If you provide us with an email or postal address, you will receive an acknowledgement of your response.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we may be required to publish your response to this consultation, but will not include any personal information. If you have requested your response to remain confidential, we may still be required to provide a summary of it.

3.4. Publishing our consultation responses

We will publish our full responses to the consultation with our review report in 2016. It will include information on responders, a summary of views, and our recommendations made in light of the consultation. The report will be made available on GOV.UK and will be circulated to all consultees and other interested parties.

3.5. Consultation principles

Government is improving the way it consults by adopting a more proportionate and targeted approach. We are running this consultation in accordance with their Consultation Principles.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way this consultation has been carried out, please contact:

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