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Oil Conservation Commission approves changes to release rule

Santa Fe, NM – Today the Oil Conservation Commission (OCC) voted unanimously to approve the final order amending the release rule, NMAC 19.15.29. The amendments, which were prompted by a joint petition filed by the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's (EMNRD) Oil Conservation Division (OCD) and WildEarth Guardians, prohibit major and minor spills from oil and gas industry operations, while giving OCD increased authority to take enforcement actions against operators who spill.

“The vote today will give EMNRD’s Oil Conservation Division another tool to uphold our statutory authority to protect human health and the environment,” said EMNRD Cabinet Secretary Sarah Cottrell Propst. “Multiple stakeholders came together to finalize this common-sense change that will benefit New Mexicans, another example of this administration’s commitment to collaboration and problem-solving.”

Under the previous rule spills were permissible, and OCD was limited to penalizing operators who failed to report the spill to OCD. Now the Division will be able to levy civil penalties against operators for spills. At the hearing, OCD staff testified that the change would encourage operators to take actions to prevent and minimize spills in the first instance.

Following the vote the final rule will go into effect upon publication in the New Mexico Register in August.

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