

US awards first deepwater permit post-Gulf spill

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Michael Bromwich, head of the Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy, said the permit was approved for US firm Noble Energy after a thorough vetting process and marked "a significant milestone" for Gulf operations.

"Noble Energy's application has met the requirements of our new safety regulations and information requirements," Bromwich said in a

conference call with reporters.

"This means among other things that Noble Energy has met new requirements to show that it is prepared to deal with a potential blowout and potential for a worst-case discharge scenario."

Bromwich said there were seven applications pending.

"We are moving forward with deepwater drilling," he said, underscoring that all applications would be determined on "a well-by-well basis."

Bromwich was brought in last June to head the Interior's highly criticized former Minerals Management Service in a reorganization aimed at strengthening oversight and policing of offshore [oil](#) and gas development following the BP spill, the worst oil disaster in US history.

A massive explosion on April 20, 2010, killed 11 workers and sank the BP-leased Deepwater Horizon rig, opening a leak that released more than 205 million gallons of oil into the [Gulf of Mexico](#), fouling US shorelines, closing rich shrimp and fishing grounds, and scaring off tourists.

Bromwich said Noble Energy demonstrated that it had the capabilities, together with contractor Helix Energy Solutions, to cap and contain a blowout.

Noble's worst-case scenario is a spill of 69,700 barrels a day, he said.

The United States on October 12 lifted a ban on deepwater drilling in the Gulf that had been due to expire at the end of November, but set operators tough new safety conditions.

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