Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Bureau of Indian Affairs has tightened up its procedure to protect Indian landowners against unwise or unwitting disposition of actual or potentially valuable mineral assets when they sell their lands, Commissioner Glenn L. Emmons announced today.

Under the new procedure all Indians who ask the Bureau to sell their trust or restricted holdings will be urged to reserve the mineral rights if the lands are located in an area where the United States Geological Survey reports the land to be prospectively valuable for minerals. The sales at issue concern only individually owned Indian lands, not tribal lands.

In other areas Indians asking for sale of their holdings will be explicitly advised by the Bureau that they may reserve all or any part of the minerals if they wish and their wishes will be complied with. In sales involving holdings of Indians who need continuing assistance in managing their affairs, all mineral rights will be automatically reserved if the Geological Survey reports the area to be of prospective value for minerals.

Up to now the Bureau of Indian Affairs has generally followed the practice of permitting Indian landowners to reserve the mineral interests in connection with sales and has advised them to do so in areas of known mineral interest or activity. Field employees now have been formally directed to place additional emphasis on the subject. Specific directions have been written into land sale application forms.