



Safeguarding the Environment for Texans

A Leader in Well Plugging

The Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) has garnered international recognition for its extensive work and expertise in well plugging, including its contribution to technological advancements in techniques that ensure proper orphaned well closures. The RRC has plugged more than 46,000 wells through its State Managed Plugging Program (SMP). The RRC employs a staff of highly trained personnel, including engineers and geoscientists, that bring decades of combined experience regulating oil and gas industry operations. Every employee is committed to the agency's mission of protecting the environment and public safety in the state of Texas.

What is an Orphaned Well?

When a well ceases production, and no longer produces oil or gas, most operators fulfill their obligations and responsibly follow the required regulatory procedures to plug their wells with cement to prevent the well from leaking and polluting land or groundwater. However, if the operator is noncompliant or goes out of business, the well becomes orphaned.

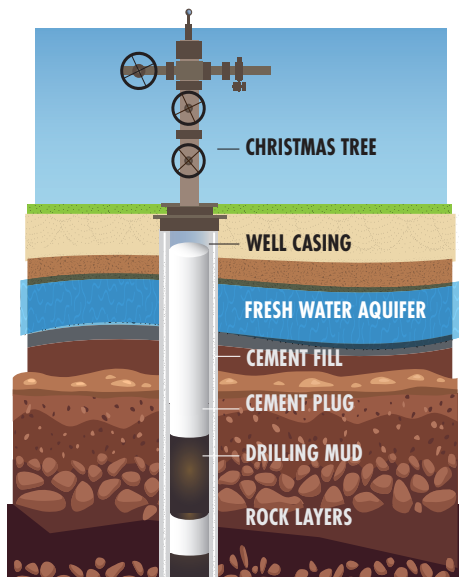
An orphaned well is any oil or gas well that has been inactive for a minimum of 12 months and the operator's Organizational Report (P-5) has been delinquent for greater than

"We continue to be a national leader in addressing orphaned wells. Our extensive well plugging experience dates to 1984, and elements of our program, such as a prioritization system that ensures high-risk, high-priority wells are plugged, have been copied by other states. The design of RRC's plugging program and our dedicated staff help us quickly work to protect groundwater around the state." - Danny Sorrells, Deputy Executive Director, Railroad Commission of Texas

12 months. Once a well is deemed to have been orphaned, it falls under the monitoring jurisdiction of the RRC, evaluated for potential hazards to the environment and public safety and placed on a list to be plugged by Railroad Commission contractors. The orphaned wells that pose the greatest risk are prioritized to be plugged first.

When contractors plug orphaned wells, an RRC inspector is on location throughout the entire operation to ensure the well is plugged to its proper depth to protect water quality. Our inspectors are highly qualified professionals whose chief objective is to protect the environment and fresh water in the very communities in which they live.

Depending on the condition of the well prior to plugging, the RRC may also conduct ongoing monitoring after the well has been plugged to ensure the well remains secure.





What is the Well Plugging Priority System?

In 2001, the Commission established a Well Plugging Priority System, that has since been replicated by other states, to prioritize plugging orphaned wells that pose a high risk to the environment first. The priority system assigns numerical values to factors in four categories: well completion, wellbore conditions, well location with respect to sensitive areas, and unique environmental, safety or economic concerns.

The priority system can be found on the RRC website.

Did you know?

- 86% of wells plugged in Fiscal Year 2024 were plugged by operators who responsibly fulfilled their well plugging obligations.
- The Commission's state plugging program has exceeded performance targets set by the Legislature to plug wells for eight straight years.
- According to a recent Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission study, Texas has seen one of the smallest increases in orphaned well populations in the country despite being the nation's number one oil and gas producer.

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Who Pays for Orphaned Well Plugging?

State Funded Plugging

In Texas, revenue from the oil and natural gas industry supports state-funded orphaned well plugging. The primary state fund used to plug orphaned wells is the Oil and Gas Regulatory and Cleanup Fund (OGRC), which is funded by revenue such as well plugging reimbursements, fees and financial securities paid by oil and gas operators.

Federal Funded Plugging

The Railroad Commission also receives federal funds to plug orphaned wells from grants such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

Award-winning Well Plugging Program

The Railroad Commission has been recognized by the Interstate Oil & Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC), a multi-state government entity, for its well plugging program.

In 2021, the Railroad Commission was awarded IOGCC's esteemed Chair's Environmental Partnership Award for its work helping the National Park Service plug 11 orphaned wells in the Padre Island National Seashore.



In 2023, the Railroad Commission received the Chair's Environmental Partnership Award for completing a complex plugging project that ensured boater safety at the Big Thicket Preserve.

10/31/2024



About the Railroad Commission:

Our mission is to serve Texas by our stewardship of natural resources and the environment, our concern for personal and community safety, and our support of enhanced development and economic vitality for the benefit of Texans. The Commission has a long and proud history of service to both Texas and to the nation, including more than 100 years regulating the oil and gas industry. The Commission also has jurisdiction over alternative fuels safety, natural gas utilities, surface mining and intrastate pipelines. Established in 1891, the Railroad Commission of Texas is the oldest regulatory agency in the state. To learn more, please visit <https://www.rrc.texas.gov/about-us/>.