

Legacy Oil and Gas Wells

Background

Since 1859 it is estimated that approximately 300,000 to 760,000 oil and gas wells have been drilled across Pennsylvania. Permitting requirements were not implemented until the mid-1900s, which means there are likely hundreds of thousands of wells that were never reported located across the oil and gas producing regions of the commonwealth.

Risks from abandoned wells

Abandoned wells can be hazardous to people and cause pollution of soil and water. Old wells can be a safety hazard simply because the associated aging infrastructure may cause bodily harm, or they can deteriorate into large holes in the ground. Methane (the primary component of natural gas) leaking from wells is also a hazard and can create explosive environments inside of buildings.

What to look for

Sometimes wells identified by a landowner are equipped with a well head and other equipment, such as piping and tanks; many times, the well is so old that the equipment is no longer present, or someone may have intentionally buried the top of the well pipe below ground surface.

Things to look for include:

- A vertical rusty metal pipe sticking out of the ground
- Pooled oil accumulation
- An area of grass or other vegetation that is always dead or distressed
- Petroleum odors
- A depression or open hole in the ground where the pipe has disappeared or been removed
- Natural gas bubbling or petroleum odors in water supplied by a well or petroleum odors associated with the water well itself

What to do if you suspect you have found a well

Contact the local [DEP District Oil and Gas office](#) and let them know that you believe you may have an abandoned well on your property. A DEP Oil & Gas Inspector will investigate the area at no charge to you and provide you with an evaluation of any risks associated with the well.

Are you responsible for abandoned wells on your property?

Finding a well on your property or uncovering a buried well does not make you responsible for the well, however, attempts to produce the well, receive economic benefit, improperly rid your property get rid of any evidence of the well, or other careless activities can make you financially responsible for the well. For your safety, it is important that a DEP oil and gas representative evaluate the well and attempt to determine if a responsible company or individual exists. If a responsible party exists, they will legally be required to properly decommission the well or bring it into compliance through some other action.