



Methane Emissions Reduction Program (MERP) Well Prioritization Process

Overview

This document outlines the prioritization process for MERP well plugging grant applications. Wells will be evaluated and scored throughout multiple phases, outlined below, in order to make an award determination

Phase 1

Initial Questions on MERP Grant Application

These initial “yes/no” questions are asked on the grant application for scoring and ranking in phase two:

1. Is a water supply well within 200 feet of the Marginal Conventional Well (MCW)?
2. Is an occupied building within 200 feet of the MCW?
3. Are “Waters of the Commonwealth”* within 100 feet of the MCW?
4. Is the MCW leaking oil, gas, or brine?
5. Is obvious or suspected contamination to soil, groundwater, surface water or water supplies present at this well?
6. Is the well easily accessible?
7. Please identify if methane emissions are detected at this well by selecting the appropriate emission level (not detected, detected, detected; may be high)
8. Utilizing the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), is the well located in an area designated as an Environmental Justice Community?

[Link to CEJST Mapping Tool](#)

9. The MERP grant is eligible for MCWs on Non-Federal Land only. Non-Federal Lands – State, private, and Tribal lands not owned by a Federal agency (e.g., Department of Interior (DOI), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Defense (DOD). A well is considered to be on non-Federal lands if the wellhead surface location is on non-Federal lands, even if the subsurface mineral rights are owned by the federal government. Is the wellhead surface located on non-Federal land?

**“Waters of the Commonwealth” shall be construed to include any and all rivers, streams, creeks, rivulets, impoundments, ditches, water courses, storm sewers, lakes, dammed water, ponds, springs and all other bodies or channels of conveyance of surface and underground water, or parts thereof, whether natural or artificial, within or on the boundaries of this Commonwealth. (35 P.S. ch. 691.1 - The Clean Streams Law)*

Once grant applications are received, answers will be weighted according to the table below to obtain a total score for each well.

Table 1
Initial Prioritization Criteria and weighting

MCW Condition or Setting	Criteria Weighting	
	No	Yes
Known or suspected soil, surface water, or groundwater impacts	0	25
Water supply well within 200 feet of MCW.	0	10
Occupied building within 200 feet of MCW.	0	10
Waters of the Commonwealth ¹ within 100 feet of MCW.	0	15
MCW leaking oil, gas, or brine? (low/high)	0	25/25
Well within CEJST Area	0	25
Maximum Total Points		110

Once each well in the application is scored, an application score will be given based on the average of the scores of top 50% scoring MCWs in the application, to the nearest highest integer. For example, the score for an application with eleven wells will be based on the average of the top six scoring MCWs.

Top scoring applications that can be plugged with annual grant allocation plus the next top scoring 10% will be selected for field verification and additional impact ranking by Oil and Gas Inspectors (OGIs) using DEP's Survey 1,2,3 well prioritization tool. The criteria and weighting provided in the table below.

Weighting	Survey 1,2,3 Criteria
Existing Contamination	
50	Contaminated Soil Suspected
25	Contaminated Soil Confirmed
50	Surface Water Impact Suspected
25	Surface Water Impact Confirmed
50	Ground Water Impact Suspected
25	Ground Water Impact Confirmed
225	Subtotal
Human Receptors	
50	Gas in occupied structure with similar isotopic signature as well
50	Oil/brine in occupies structure believed to be associated with the well
25	Soil gas within 200 feet of structure believed to be associated with the well
25	Gas in water supply
15	Oil/brine in water supply
165	Subtotal
Ecological Receptors	
25	Liquids (oil/brine) to stream or wetland from well
25	HQ/EV Watershed?
10	Oil/brine seep (discharge not from wellbore)?
60	Subtotal
Well Site Hazards	
25	Any ambient H2S detection? If yes record reading.
25	Any ambient LEL readings > 10%? If yes record reading.
10	Sustained ambient LEL <10%? If yes record reading.
10	Unstable equipment, open pits, E&S issues/washouts? If yes, explain.
5	Evidence of historical liquid spills not associated with well? If yes, explain.
75	Subtotal

Weighting	Survey 1,2,3 Criteria
Well Integrity	
25	Gas present outside surface casing/present in stream or liquid flow to surface
15	Measurable annular flow of gas
10	Wellhead pressure observed (in non-producing strings)
10	Severe corrosion (pitting) on well component that possibly contains pressure or fluids
60	Subtotal
Setbacks and Surroundings	
10	Well within 200 feet of occupied building or water supply well
5	Well located in known gas migration area but not believed to be source
5	Well within 100 feet of stream
5	Well within 300 feet of any wetland >1 acre in size
40	Well within CEJST Area or within ¼ mile
65	Subtotal
675	Total of All Criteria

Phase 4

Final Application Score

After the field verification for application is completed, DEP will score each MCW proposed for plugging based on Survey 1,2,3 information on the well's integrity, presence of contamination, and proximity to human and ecological receptors. These MCW scores will be used to calculate a final application score. Once the application period has closed, DEP will rank each application based on the application score and determine the number of applications that can be funded for the grant round. These final application scores will be used to select applicants awarded grants and they will be notified of the grant amount, and then posted on the public website.