

ABANDONED AND ORPHAN OIL AND GAS WELLS AND THE WELL PLUGGING PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Since the first commercial oil well was drilled in Pennsylvania in 1859, it is estimated that 325,000 oil and gas wells have been drilled in the state. Pennsylvania began permitting new drilling operations in 1956, and in 1985 oil and gas operators began being required to register old wells. In the prior years of the oil and gas industry in Pennsylvania, many wells were not properly plugged when abandoned.

An unplugged abandoned well can be a hazard to the health and safety of people and cause pollution to the environment. Air, water and soil contamination can be attributed to leaking wells.

Due to the problems that abandoned wells can cause, the Oil and Gas Act of 1984 required oil and gas well operators to plug non-producing wells. The Well Plugging Program has been established to plug abandoned and orphan wells where no responsible party has been identified.

In 1992, the legislature amended the Oil and Gas Act of 1984 to allow certain oil and gas wells abandoned before April 1985 to be classified as orphan wells. This amendment gave the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) the authority to plug orphan wells if landowners, leaseholders and oil and gas operators have received no economic benefit from the well after April 18, 1979.

Surcharges were established by the Oil and Gas Act to fund the orphan and abandoned Well Plugging Program. The 2012 Oil and Gas Act, Section 3271, continued the provision for surcharges. Well plugging contracts are funded with permit surcharges which are in addition to the permit application fee. The orphan surcharge is \$200 for a gas well or \$100 for an oil well. The abandoned well surcharge is \$50.

If a registered well has not been operated in a year and if the well has an inactive status, the well is considered abandoned and the operator must plug the well. Where no responsible party is identified for abandoned or orphan wells, they are plugged utilizing the surcharges from the orphan and abandoned plugging funds through the Well Plugging Program.

IDENTIFYING ABANDONED AND ORPHAN WELLS

If an abandoned well is discovered, DEP is to be notified within 60 days of finding it. DEP will investigate the well to determine if it qualifies as an abandoned or orphan well. Please contact the appropriate regional office as seen on this fact sheet if you are aware of any abandoned wells.

INFORMATION AND APPLICATION FORMS

This fact sheet is a brief summary of law, regulation and policy on orphan and abandoned wells. Please do not rely on this alone for firm guidance about any specific situation. For more information on abandoned or orphan oil and gas wells and the Well Plugging Program, contact one of these offices:



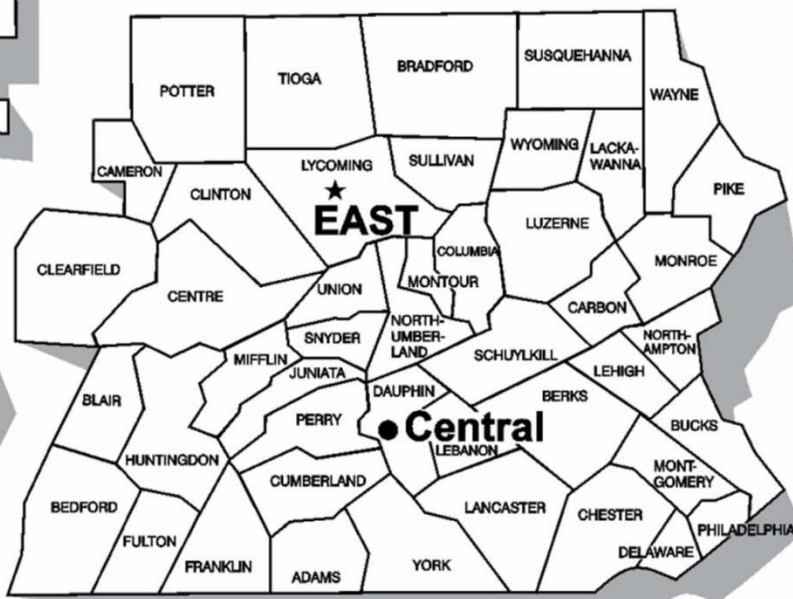
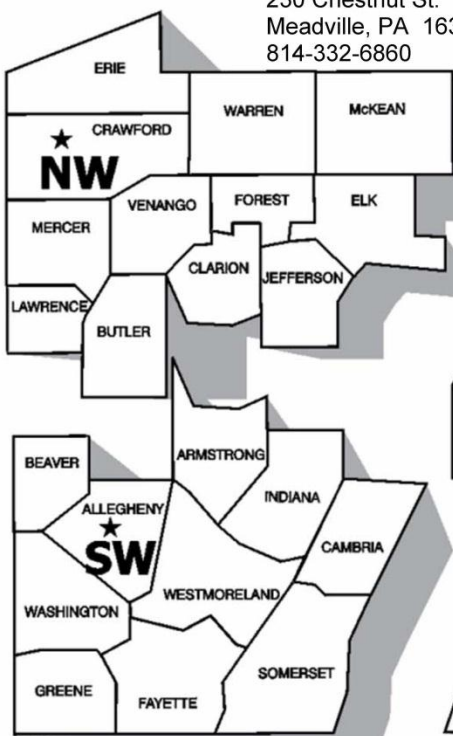
Oil and Gas Districts

★ Northwest District

230 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
814-332-6860

★ Eastern District

208 West Third St.
Williamsport, PA 17701-6448
570-327-3636



★ Southwest District

400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
412-442-4024

● Central Office

Bureau of Oil and Gas Planning and Program Management
P.O. Box 8765
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8765
717-772-2199

For more information, visit www.dep.state.pa.us, keyword: Oil and Gas.