



Safeguarding the Environment for Texans

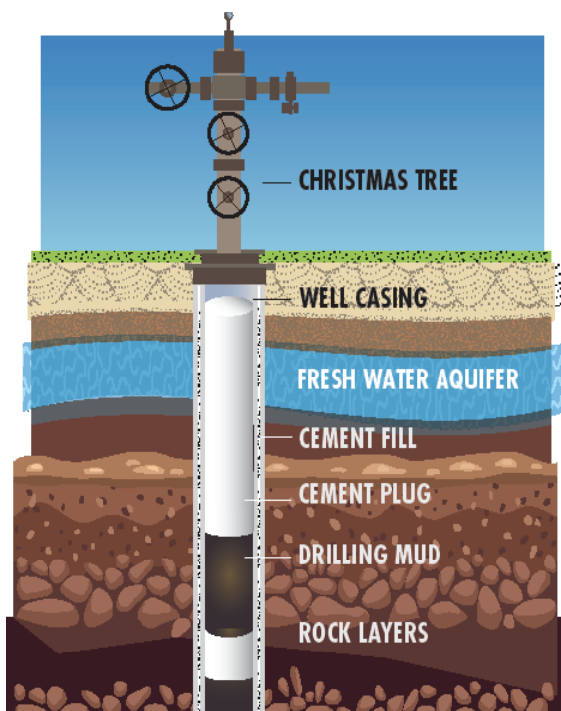
A Leader in Well Plugging

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 47,000 wells through its State Managed Plugging Program (SMP). The RRC employs a staff of highly trained personnel, including engineers and geoscientists, who 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.

"We continue to be a national leader in addressing orphaned wells. Our extensive well plugging experience dates back to 1984. The design of the RRC's well 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

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 12 months. Once a well is deemed to have been orphaned, it falls under the monitoring jurisdiction of the RRC, is evaluated for potential hazards to the environment and public safety and placed on a list to be plugged by RRC 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, including 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 environment to prioritize plugging orphaned wells that pose a high risk to the environment. 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.

[Visit Website](#)

Did You Know?

- 86% of wells plugged in Fiscal Year 2025 were plugged by operators who responsibly fulfilled their well plugging obligations.
- The Commission routinely exceeds performance targets set by the legislature to plug wells.
- According to a recent Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) study, Texas has seen one of the smallest increases in orphaned well population in the country despite being the nation's number one oil and gas producer.

Who Pays for Orphaned Well Plugging?

State Funded Plugging

In Texas, revenue from the oil and natural gas industry pays for the cost of 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.

Federally 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 RRC has earned repeated recognition from the IOGCC, a multi-state government entity, for its well plugging program.

In 2021, the agency received the Chair's Stewardship Award for Environmental Partnership for assisting the National Park Service in plugging 11 orphaned wells in Padre Island National Seashore. The RRC was honored again in 2023 for completing a complex plugging project that improved boater safety in the Big Thicket Preserve.

Most recently, in 2025, the Commission earned its third Chair's Stewardship Award for one of the most complex offshore orphaned well plugging and abandonment operations ever completed in U.S. waters, conducted in coordination with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Orphaned Wells Program Office, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, the Texas General Land Office and Crescent Energy Services.



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/>.