# **State proposes plugging more than 100 orphan oil wells in Kern**

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**Body**

Jul. 19—***Kern*** has emerged as a big focus of California's first-phase plan to spend state and federal money properly plugging and abandoning orphan ***oil*** and gas wells deemed to be a threat to the health and safety of nearby residents.

More than 100 wells in the county were on a list state regulators released for public review late Tuesday. Dozens of facilities were included that have been found to be leaking methane despite fines against companies that remain legally liable for the problems.

The list's distribution follows months of planning and outreach to communities anxious to stop the kind of leaks found this year and last in the Bakersfield and Arvin area, where wells that have sat idle were found to be emitting greenhouse gas unchecked at sometimes high rates for an indeterminate duration.

Methane can pose respiratory and other health problems, and if it gathers in an enclosed area without being vented, it can ignite.

Tuesday's announcement began a 20-day period of public comment, after which time the California Geologic Energy Management Division expects to spend some of the $100 million in government money set aside to tackle the problem.

"In addition to protecting front-line communities, we're also supporting job opportunities for Californians in the state's workforce training pilot to train displaced ***oil*** and gas workers," state Department of Conservation Director David Shabazian said in a news release.

He emphasized the state is "not letting anyone off the hook" and will consider "all possible enforcement actions" to recover the cost of capping the wells from responsible parties.

Community organizer Cesar Aguirre with the Central California Environmental Justice Network, for which leaks have become a priority since the discovery in spring of 27 methane-emitting wells in the Arvin-Lamont area, said by email Wednesday the state's list "looks like a good first step."

"Plugging wells makes sure the state doesn't spend its limited funds coming back to repair recurring leaks like they had to both times they did sweeping inspections in the ***Kern*** area," Aguirre wrote, adding the organization hopes the more problematic operators are dealt with soon.

"Making polluters pay will save the state billions," he stated. "We should focus on companies being responsible for their mess rather than using state funds."

CalGEM's news release noted 22 of the wells proposed for plugging in the Arvin and Lamont areas are owned by Los Gatos-based Sunray Petroleum Inc., which the agency said has outstanding violations dating to 2017. Eleven of the wells that were found to be leaking earlier this year have been repaired, but the idea now is to permanently seal them.

Also on this week's list were 37 wells owned by Citadel Exploration Inc. in or near Bakersfield. CalGEM reported the San Diego-based company has failed to maintain the facilities or pay fees and fines for its noncompliance, and that inspections have turned up evidence of leaks, ***oil***-stained soils and trash on Citadel's property. Last year, state regulators found high levels of methane leaking from some of the company's local properties.

Other wells that made the list in ***Kern*** County were 37 owned by El Segundo-based Blackstone ***Oil*** and Gas, one belonging to Hartley Natural Resource Development, based in Bakersfield, and one owned by Prine ***Oil*** Co.

Additionally, CalGEM wants to plug and abandon 25 wells Griffin Resources LLC owns in Fresno and ***Kern*** counties, and six wells owned by Tri-Valley ***Oil*** & Gas in Fresno and ***Kern*** counties.

Public comments on the proposal are being accepted by email. The address is CalGemOrphanWells@conservation.ca.gov

Editor's note: This story has been updated to include the email for sending public comments.

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