# **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."

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