

WELL WATCH PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is the Well Watch Program?

The Well Watch Program is designed to encourage local land users to report concerns with historic, abandoned well sites to the Office of the Regulator of Oil and Gas Operations (OROGO) so that they can be assessed and any identified risks can be addressed.

What are the goals of the Well Watch Program?

The goals of the Well Watch Program are to:

- Inform communities about the historic, abandoned wells in their vicinity;
- Leverage community members' knowledge of their traditional areas to improve the information available to OROGO:
 - For prioritizing well inspections; and
 - About the location and status of historic, abandoned wells;
- Address risks and concerns associated with historic, abandoned wells as they are identified; and
- Increase the visibility of OROGO's activities at the community level.

Why does OROGO care about abandoned wells?

Although OROGO does not have a legal obligation to inspect abandoned wells, it does have a mandate to protect the environment and human safety. Leaking wells are not good for the environment: oil is difficult to clean up and takes a long time to break down and methane is a potent greenhouse gas.

OROGO also wants to collect more information about old wells in the area that it regulates and confirm the information it already has about these wells by talking with nearby community members.

How many abandoned wells are there in OROGO's jurisdiction?

There are just under 600 abandoned wells in OROGO's area of jurisdiction, which is roughly the size of the province of British Columbia. These wells were drilled between 1920 and 2012. Some are located near communities, but the majority are in more isolated parts of the Northwest Territories.

What is an abandoned well?

Abandoned wells have been permanently plugged and the well casing has been cut and capped below the ground surface. They are usually identified by a well marker, although the marker may be hard to see.

Can abandoned wells leak?

Abandoned oil and gas wells do not usually leak but, over time, they can fail.

Are abandoned wells dangerous?

Most abandoned wells are not leaking and are safe. If a well is leaking, the level of danger depends on the size of the leak and what is leaking. Most leaking wells are not dangerous to people who are just passing by.

However, it is important to be cautious if you think you have found a leaking well. Do not attempt to investigate it yourself – avoid the site and report that you have seen to OROGO as soon as possible.

How do communities participate in Well Watch?

OROGO knows that the people who use the land are in the best place to notice changes to the land. They can serve as extra eyes for OROGO to notice if something is wrong.

Community members can provide information on historic, abandoned wells in their traditional areas. They may remember when and where the well was drilled and are more likely to notice changes to a well site as they travel on the land.

Information from community members will help OROGO to target its inspection activities towards well sites that may have issues and that are in areas used by NWT residents.

Community members may also play important roles by providing accommodations, transportation, guiding and bear monitoring services during OROGO inspections.

How does the Well Watch Program work?

The Well Watch Program involves the following steps:

1. Meeting with the community to introduce the program and explain how to participate.
2. Responding to specific community concerns about nearby wells by sharing the information OROGO has on those wells and learning from the community about the history of the wells and any concerns.

3. Planning any required inspections of the wells with the community and involving community members in inspections when it is possible and safe to do so.
4. Reviewing the results of the inspections with the community and making them public on OROGO's website.
5. Following up on any potential risks identified with the owner of the well.

What happens if a leak is found?

If a leak is found, the company that drilled the well should fix the problem. If the company no longer exists, the successor company is responsible for the well.

Who is responsible for a leaking well if no owner can be found?

If no owner can be found, responsibility for a leaking well rests with the land owner, usually the Government of the Northwest Territories.

How do I contact OROGO about the Well Watch Program?

For more information or to participate in the program, please call OROGO at 867-767-9097. You can also email OROGO at orogo@gov.nt.ca.