



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name:	Planning & Development
Department No.:	053
Agenda Date:	October 21, 2025
Placement:	Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time:	30 minutes
Continued Item:	No
If Yes, date from:	N/A
Vote Required:	Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director(s): Lisa Plowman, Planning & Development
Contact: Errin Briggs, Energy, Minerals & Compliance Division
SUBJECT: Status of Orphan and Idle Wells in Santa Barbara County

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- Receive and file a report on the status of orphan and idle wells in the County of Santa Barbara; and
- Determine that the above action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA guidelines, because they consist of administrative activities of the government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.).

Summary Text:

This Board Letter provides an update on the status of orphan and idle oil and gas wells located in Santa Barbara County, along with state and local regulatory context for their abandonment.

Discussion:

As of September of 2025, according to the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) records, there are a total of 2,260 active and idle oil and gas wells in Santa Barbara County. Of these, 1,039 wells are categorized as active and 1,221 are considered idle. Approximately 3,663 oil and gas wells have been plugged and abandoned in the County's jurisdiction to date.

Idle Wells

The County defines “idle wells” differently than CalGEM:

- County Code Chapter 25 (Petroleum Code) defines "Idle well" as any well that has not produced oil or natural gas or has not been used for injection for six consecutive months of continuous operation during the last five or more years.
- CalGEM’s definition of idle wells includes wells that have not been used for two years or more and have not yet been properly plugged and abandoned (sealed and closed).

Plugging and abandonment of wells involves permanently sealing the well with a cement plug to isolate the hydrocarbon-bearing formation from water sources and prevent leakage to the surface. If a well is not properly sealed and closed, it may provide a pathway for hydrocarbons or other contaminants to migrate into drinking water or to the surface.

CalGEM revised its idle well regulations in April 2019 to create more stringent testing requirements to better protect public safety and the environment from potential threats posed by idle wells. These regulations require idle wells to be tested and, if necessary, repaired, or permanently sealed and closed. These regulations also created incentives for operators to manage and eliminate their idle wells by entering into Idle Well Management Plans (IWMP’s). Under the IWMP, operators are required to describe how idle wells are to be maintained and when they are expected to be plugged and abandoned or returned to service. Operators are incentivized to prioritize the phasing out of their long-term idle wells (idle for 8 years or more) either through abandonment or return to service.

In September 2024, Assembly Bill 1866 (AB 1866 Hart) amended the State’s idle well requirements to provide additional protections. AB 1866 increases the requirements on oil and gas operators to identify and reduce the number of idle wells within their portfolio or pay a fee. Operators are required to prioritize which wells to address first, taking into account age of the well, potential risks posed to life, health, property, or natural resources and proximity to sensitive receptors (within 3,200 feet). Operators must eliminate a set percentage of their idle wells annually, based on the total number of idle wells they own in California and the calendar year (see table 1). Also, any operator that does not file an IWMP must pay idle well fees annually which have been increased to reflect the potential costs associated with the State performing abandonment. Idle well fees paid pursuant to AB 1866 are set aside for the state’s Well Abandonment Program (Table 2). More information on CalGEM’s Idle Well Program can be found on their website at https://www.conservation.ca.gov/calgem/idle_well.

Table 1. CalGEM Well Elimination Rates Pursuant to AB 1866

State-Wide Idle Well Count	CY 2025-2027	CY 2028-2029	CY 2030
0-250	5%	6%	8%
251-1,250	6%	8%	10%
1,251-3,000	7%	10%	15%
3,001+	15%	18%	20%

Table 2. Idle Well Fees

Years Idle	Fee
0 – 2.99	\$1,000
3 – 7.99	\$2,500
8 – 14.99	\$5,000
15 – 19.99	\$12,500
20 +	\$22,500

According to CalGEM, there are currently 1,221 idle wells in Santa Barbara County managed by (32) different operators. Attachment B includes an exhibit showing the locations of all idle wells in the County and Attachment C includes a list of all operators with idle wells in Santa Barbara County. Of these, 22 operators have not filed IWMP's and are responsible for 749 idle wells. Because they have not filed the required plan, they are required to pay CalGEM the idle well fees. Eleven (11) local operators have filed formal IWMP's to CalGEM pursuant to AB 1866, thereby avoiding the requirement to pay idle well fees. These IWMP's include 472 idle wells. The Plans cumulatively identify 114 wells (approximately 25% of the idle wells) to be plugged and abandoned over the upcoming 8-year period as shown below in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of IWMP's from Santa Barbara County Operators

	Active	Idle	Ave Idle Years	Required Elimination Rate	Wells to be Abandoned	Plan Period
Krummrich Engineering Corporation	2	3	5.94	5%	3	3
Asphalta, LLC	51	18	7.46	5%	18	8
HDT, Inc.	3	2	4.67	5%	2	2
Aera Energy	0	1	35.92	15%	1	8
B.E. Conway	69	6	8.08	5%	1	5
Pacific Coast Energy Company	242	163	12.53	5%	22	3
California Resources Production Corporation	0	25	26.33	7%	3	8
Chevron	0	4	57	15%	4	8
E&B Natural Resources	98	224	28.8	6%	34	7
PRE Resources, LLC	2	7	2.92	5%	7	8
Sentinel Peak Resources California, LLC	62	19	23.71	7%	19	8
TOTAL	529	472			114	

Some operators included in this table have idle wells outside of the county; therefore, the elimination rate and number of wells to be abandoned may not solely reflect activities in Santa Barbara County.

Orphan Wells

Orphan well, according to CalGEM's definition, is "a well that has no party responsible making it the states responsibility to plug and abandon it." The County's Petroleum Code does not include a

definition of orphan well, nor does it include any requirements for such wells. All orphan wells are considered to be idle under the Petroleum Code. Orphan wells can threaten public health, safety, and the environment because they can leak oil, emit greenhouse gases, and pose physical hazards. The County of Santa Barbara does not have a legal or financial responsibility to address orphan wells; however, the County Petroleum Unit does inspect all wells including what the state defines as orphan wells, on an annual basis for health and safety purposes and to ensure the minimum standards of Chapter 25 are maintained.

CalGEM's Oil and Gas Well Abandonment Program oversees all orphan wells in the state. Through a state contract, CalGEM facilitates the plugging and abandonment (permanent closure and sealing to regulatory standards) of orphan oil and gas wells and decommissioning of associated production facilities. If a financially solvent, responsible operator can be identified in the historic chain of ownership, CalGEM will first pursue action at the operator's expense. In the absence of a solvent responsible party, CalGEM assumes the responsibility of addressing these wells and directly facilitates plugging and abandonment. CalGEM has developed the Orphan Well Abandonment Expenditure Plan as a tool to track, categorize and prioritize orphan wells throughout the State. Wells are prioritized based upon level of risk for leaking, any historic compliance issues, and/or proximity to sensitive receptors such as schools, homes or health care facilities (3200 feet). The highest risk wells and production facilities were abandoned in Phase I of the Program which included 378 wells and 51 facilities across the state. Phase II will include any remaining high-risk wells and production facilities including 217 wells and 74 facilities also across the state. Any wells and facilities not included in Phases I and II will be addressed in the future.

Table 4 below identifies the owners of the orphan wells in Santa Barbara County and their abandonment status. As of 2023, there were 361 orphan wells in the County. Between 2023-2025, 172 of those wells were abandoned in Phase 1 of CalGEM's Orphan Well Abandonment Expenditure Plan. Consistent with CalGEM's prioritization protocols, Phase I prioritized wells that CalGEM believed presented the greatest threats to public health and safety. Of the remaining 189 orphan wells, HVI Cat Canyon (former Greka subsidiary, now bankrupt) owns 38 and Angel Petroleum (non-responsive operator located in Cat Canyon, Santa Maria Valley and Casmalia) owns 151. Because CalGEM assumes responsibility for permanently abandoning these wells, they are included in the State's Abandonment Expenditure Plan inventory. Of the 38 HVI Cat Canyon, Inc. wells, 11 are actively planned to be abandoned as part of their Phase II Abandonment Expenditure Plan and the remaining 27 are proposed for closure in the future.

Table 4. Summary of Orphan Wells by Operator in Santa Barbara County

Operator	Number of Orphan Wells (as of 2023)	Abandoned by CalGEM Phase I (Completed)	To be Abandoned by CalGEM Phase II	Remaining to be Abandoned by CalGEM at Later Date
HVI Cat Canyon	210	172	11	27
Angel Petroleum	151	0	0	151
Total	361	172	11	178

Operators who transferred wells after 1996 are responsible for reimbursing the state for the plugging and abandonment costs. It should be noted that 33 of the HVI Cat Canyon wells and 49 of the Angel Petroleum wells were previously operated by California Resources Corporation (CRC), the largest oil operator in the state, after 1996. Two of the Angel wells were operated by Chevron after 1996. Because CRC and Chevron are financially solvent, CalGEM is pursuing ongoing discussions with these companies about how these well abandonments will be completed. The 102 orphan wells owned by Angel Petroleum where there is not a prior financially responsible party, will be abandoned by CalGEM at a later date.

Background:

On September 16, 2025, the Board directed staff to provide a comprehensive status report on the number, location, and condition of orphan and idle oil and gas wells in Santa Barbara County, along with any current plans for their abandonment.

Performance Measure:

N/A

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

The staff costs to prepare and present this item are borne by oil and gas operators. Funding for this activity is budgeted in the Planning and Development's Permitting Budget Program on Page 307 of the County of Santa Barbara Fiscal Year 2025-26 Adopted Budget.

Fiscal Analysis:

N/A

Special Instructions:

The Planning and Development Department Hearing Support shall publish a legal notice in the Santa Barbara News-Press or equivalent at least 10 days prior to the hearing on October 21, 2025. The Clerk of the Board shall forward the minute order of the hearing as well as a copy of the notice and proof of publication to the Planning and Development Department, Hearing Support, Attention: David Villalobos.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Locations of orphan oil and gas wells in Santa Barbara County

Attachment B – Locations of idle oil and gas wells in Santa Barbara County

Attachment C – Summary of Operators with idle wells in Santa Barbara County

Contact Information:

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