

# Legacy oil and gas wells

## What you need to know about abandoned wells in southwestern Ontario

Across Ontario, there are approximately 27,000 inactive oil and gas wells, many of them on private lands in southwestern Ontario. In some cases, landowners may not even be aware of an abandoned oil or gas well on their property because the well is no longer producing or is not visible above ground.

Improperly constructed, maintained or abandoned wells present a risk to public safety and the environment, including groundwater resources. For this reason, the Government of Ontario is supporting municipalities in raising awareness of this issue in their communities and enhancing their emergency preparedness efforts.

Government support is also available to landowners through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Abandoned Works Program, which provides financial assistance and guidance to eligible landowners in plugging old and inactive oil and gas wells that are at heightened risk.

## Signs you may have an abandoned well on your property

The following sites or signs could indicate the presence of an abandoned well, especially if your property is in a former or current oil and gas producing area.

- Farm properties with multiple farmsteads, abandoned land or structures, uncultivated sites or sinking land.
- Areas with different or stunted vegetation, compacted trails or sites, oil residue, or abandoned drilling pads.
- Areas with soil staining or vegetation die-off caused by leaking wells.
- A rotten egg smell caused by hydrogen sulphide, a poisonous gas.
- Natural gas bubbling or oil odours in well water.

**If you think there's an abandoned well on your property, do not investigate it yourself.**



**You will need a certified well contractor to perform this work.**

## Potential risks and hazards

- Poisoning from hydrogen sulphide gas (with a rotten egg smell) that may be released from leaking wells.
- Flammable or combustible environments inside buildings caused by the release of methane.
- Tripping or collision hazards caused by sinking ground over existing or mined caverns.
- Fires or spills caused by blowouts, the uncontrolled release of oil or gas.
- Contaminated soil or groundwater.

## How to get help

A legacy oil or gas well must be plugged by a professional contractor to meet today's regulatory standards. Landowners may qualify for financial support through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Abandoned Works Program. This program helps property owners by:

- Determining if a well qualifies for the program.
- Assessing wells based on the risk to public safety and potential for environmental damage.
- Arrange for a certified well contractor to plug the well. Wells that are ranked as immediate or significant hazards are plugged first.

## Protecting your safety and your property

If your property is the potential site of an abandoned well, seeking more information and understanding the risks is an important first step. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry can help assess your situation and ensure a well is plugged according to regulatory standards.



To check for well activity in your area, visit the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Library Petroleum Well Map: [www.ogsrlibrary.com/maps/wells](http://www.ogsrlibrary.com/maps/wells)

### If you know or think you may have an abandoned well:

- Stop any plans to build over top of a petroleum well.
- Keep instructions for shutting off gas and water valves handy and read them carefully.

**Be prepared.** Every household should have an emergency plan and emergency kit to respond to potential unexpected emergencies. An emergency plan outlines where you would seek shelter if you had to leave your home, evacuation routes, family emergency communications plan, and a 72-hour emergency kit containing essential supplies. Visit [www.Oxford72hours.ca](http://www.Oxford72hours.ca) to learn more.



**If you suspect you have a legacy oil or gas well on your property, please contact:**

**Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry**  
Petroleum Operations Section

[posrecords@ontario.ca](mailto:posrecords@ontario.ca) | 519-873-4634  
[ontario.ca/page/abandoned-works-program](http://ontario.ca/page/abandoned-works-program)



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This public education outreach is possible through funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.