

# Assembly Bill 1328– Oil and gas: well records

## Assemblymember Chris R. Holden

### SUMMARY

There is a vast amount of untapped data available on the leakage of idle and abandoned oil wells in CA that the public does not have access to. Much like active production sites – idle, abandoned and hazardous oil and gas wells can leak pollution.

Private oil and gas companies, and DOGGR are plugging idle and abandoned wells. As they do, they test the wells for compounds like methane and hydrogen sulfide prior to starting work – these compounds can be a sign of other air pollutants leaking as well. However, the companies are not required to make the results public.

AB 1328 would remove secrecy around oil and gas operations by requiring that air pollution data – which is being collected anyway – be made public and is submitted to the Air Resources Board. Wells that are shown to have major leaks during normal testing may be required to conduct additional direct testing, if oil and gas companies are not already performing that work.

### BACKGROUND

There are tens of thousands of abandoned oil wells in California. While many are being tested for air pollution because they are getting plugged, thousands are not. Potential emissions include methane and benzene. Methane is a potent climate change gas while other co-emitted air pollutants like benzene can cause cancer. Fortunately, there is a low-cost and easy way to gather data on the wells that are being plugged to determine if more needs to be done with those that are not.

Pursuant to recent legislation (AB 2729 (Williams, 2016) and SB724 (Lara, 2017)) California is embarking on an ambitious effort to reduce the number of non-operating idle, abandoned and hazardous oil and gas wells in the state. These laws require that oil well owners and the Department of Conservation's Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR), plug some of the idle and abandoned wells. When doing so, companies routinely perform tests to check for leaks before the well is sealed, but this information is not required to be made public. These operators also conduct tests for leakage in

accordance with new rules passed by the California Air Resources Board, but again, these test results are not publically disclosed.

Peer-reviewed scientific research demonstrates that emissions from oil and gas wells at distances can cause negative health exposures. Potential leaks affect people – and the state has an interest in this information. If this information was made available, California could study it and determine whether tens of thousands of abandoned wells across California are likely leaking.

### THE SOLUTION

AB 1328 would make the following information available on DOGGR's website and require it to be transmitted to CARB:

1. Emissions data already being collected on oil and gas wells that are being plugged and abandoned by oil and gas operators pursuant to an idle well management plan,
2. Emissions data already being collected about hazardous / abandoned wells that are being plugged and abandoned by DOGGR, and
3. Additional information from enhanced flow rate testing for wells where an active major emissions sources is discovered.

AB 1328 would also require DOGGR to perform a review of the effectiveness of well plugging operations to eliminate air emissions.

### Support

**Support:** Environmental Defense Fund (Sponsor)

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