

Interior Department approves \$1B to clean up abandoned wells

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The Department of Interior is spending \$1.15 billion to cap abandoned oil and gas wells across the United States.

There are over 3 million abandoned oil and [gas wells](#) in the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency. And Interior officials say that wells have been exposing millions of people to air and [water pollution](#) for decades.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland said in a statement Monday that the funding will help the country "confront the legacy pollution and long-standing environmental injustices that for too long have plagued underrepresented communities." Much of the funding is focused on plugging wells in communities of color and in rural and tribal communities.

The funds are coming from \$4.7 billion set aside from the bipartisan infrastructure bill to create a federal program to clean up wells. Officials hope the well cleanup effort also will create jobs and help stimulate [economic growth](#).

"We're particularly excited about these investments because they will be job creators," said Winnie Stachelberg, infrastructure coordinator at Interior. "In addition to creating immediate jobs addressing the pollution, these investments will build a foundation for future job growth once sites are cleaned up."

Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Oklahoma and California—states an Associated Press examination found have among the most abandoned wells—are eligible to get the largest shares of funding from the \$1.15 billion.

States will have to apply for funding set aside for well cleanup. The Interior Department said nearly every state with documented abandoned wells expressed interest in applying.

Abandoned wells are a growing problem around the U.S. as oil and gas companies leave them behind and communities shift away from fossil fuel production. About two-thirds of the millions of the abandoned wells haven't been plugged, and many are releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

In California, which has 4,844 documented abandoned wells, there is a statewide push to shift away from fossil fuel production. California Gov. Gavin Newsom has pledged to phase out oil and gas drilling in the state completely by 2045. Last week, the Los Angeles City Council voted to ban new oil and gas drilling and phase out hundreds of existing wells.

Decades of well abandonment in states such as California, Texas and Pennsylvania—along with industry and government plans to shut down more wells—have left communities around the country scrambling to figure out how to clean up well sites.

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