



Methane and Bonding

Oil and gas bonding dramatically decreases methane emissions. The Trump administration wants to repeal this safeguard.

State-of-Play

Under President Trump's Executive Order 14156, "Declaring a National Energy Emergency," and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the rules for oil and gas leasing on federal public lands are being rolled back to favor major corporations at the expense of communities and the environment. Now, bonding, a critical policy to protect communities that requires oil and gas operators to clean up wells and surrounding sites, is also under attack. Without adequate bonding, bad actors have little to deter them from abandoning wells after they are no longer productive, and the cost to clean up their messes is left unfunded. On the ground, this looks like abandoned and orphaned wells left uncapped to pour millions of tons of methane into the atmosphere each year.

What is bonding?

Bonding acts like an insurance policy for communities and the environment. Under current law, oil and gas operators must pay a bond before drilling begins. If the operator plugs or "reclaims" the well, the bond is returned. If operators do not reclaim the well, the bond is used to clean up the site, protecting nearby communities and restoring our ability to enjoy healthy public lands.

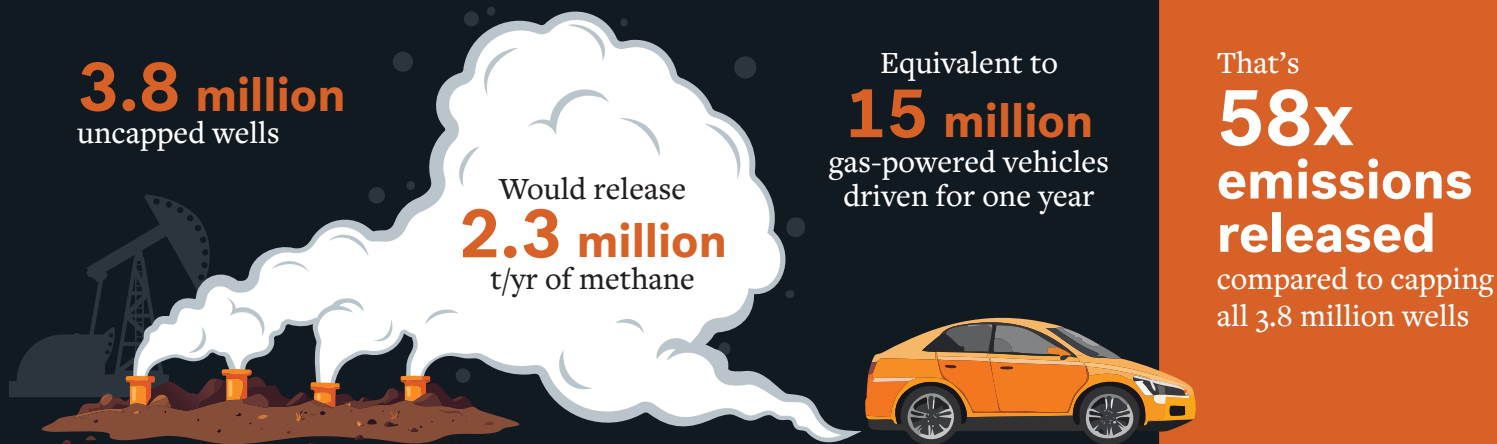
Reform Efforts

Bonding reform was included in the BLM Onshore Oil & Gas Leasing Rule finalized in 2024. The rule updated oil and bonding rates for the first time in 60 years by:

- Increasing the minimum bond for all wells within a lease to \$150,000 from \$10,000;
- Increasing the minimum bond for all an operator's wells within a state to \$500,000 from \$25,000;
- Eliminating nationwide bonding—a practice that allowed a given operator to purchase one bond at \$150,000 to cover all their wells across the country.

According to the [GAO](#), low-cost well reclamation projects average around \$20,000, while high-cost projects average around \$145,000. Furthermore, as of 2018, the average bond per well was just \$2,122.

By better accounting for decades of inflation and the true cost of well reclamation, the rule helps ensure that bonds act as adequate collateral—both to disincentivize bad behavior and to pay for plugging, when needed—and will stem the proliferation of orphaned and abandoned wells.



Chandler M. (2025). Methane and Bonding Supplementary Information. The Wilderness Society. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17635316>

Emissions and Health Risks of Going Back

Without adequate bonding, developers often choose to abandon unproductive wells or declare bankruptcy, leaving their wells unplugged. Unplugged wells are a significant source of methane pollution in the United States. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas. In fact, pound for pound, methane is “over 80 times more potent in causing warming than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.”¹ Even conservative estimates find that the average methane emission rate across these end-of-life orphaned and abandoned wells is approximately 70 grams/hour, which, over the course of the year, is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from 4 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.

Doing away with bonding means millions of additional wells pouring methane into the atmosphere long after they are no longer producing oil or gas. According to a recent [report](#) from Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship (CRS), the Trump administration’s leasing regime could mean drilling up to 3.8 million oil and gas wells on our public lands in the coming years. Estimates suggest that changes to the bonding requirement could mean an additional 2.3 million metric tons of methane released each year, the equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions of more than 15 million gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.

In contrast, plugging wells leads to a significant decrease in methane emissions, and higher minimum bond rates help ensure reclamation occurs. In fact, the BLM reported that all eight methane-emitting orphaned wells they plugged through the Orphaned Wells Program were no longer emitting detectable levels of methane.²

Communities near orphaned wells can also experience serious health impacts from methane emissions. In fact, an [analysis](#) by the Environmental Defense Fund found that 14 million people in the United States live within one mile of an orphaned well. Containing tiny particles that cause ground-level ozone, methane gas is directly linked to causing and worsening breathing problems, heart disease, cancer, and strokes.

Weakening the bonding requirements means millions of additional unplugged oil and gas wells. This negligence not only shifts cleanup costs onto communities but also permits the continuous release of millions of tons of highly potent methane gas into the atmosphere. By rewriting the rules for oil and gas leasing, the administration is unfairly tipping the scales of public lands policy in favor of the oil and gas industry. The rollback of these protections will amplify the effects of climate change that are already being felt by communities across the West and put our freedom to enjoy healthy public lands at risk. The link between these regulatory changes and increased environmental damage could not be clearer.

Ask

We urge you to **oppose any proposed rescission of the BLM’s 2024 Onshore Oil & Gas Leasing Rule** bonding provisions and to support rigorous implementation and enforcement.

1 Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. (2022, April 4). IPCC 6th Assessment Report Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change Reaffirms Central Role of Methane Mitigation to Keep the Climate Safe. <https://www.igsd.org/ipcc-6th-assessment-report-working-group-iii-mitigation-of-climate-change-reaffirms-central-role-of-methane-mitigation-to-keep-the-climate-safe>

2 U.S. Department of the Interior, Orphaned Wells Program Office. (2024, November). Orphaned Wells Program Annual Report to Congress: Fiscal Year 2024 (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Section 40601). <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2024-11/fy-2024-owpo-annual-congressional-reportfinal-publishing.pdf>