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## **State's orphan well program turns environmental challenges into success stories**

**SANTA FE** – The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) has achieved significant milestones in its ongoing efforts to address methane emissions and environmental hazards through its orphan well plugging program. Supported by federal funding, particularly from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), EMNRD's Oil Conservation Division (OCD) has emerged as a leader in combating methane pollution and safeguarding the environment.

A recent triumph in Carlsbad, New Mexico demonstrates the effectiveness of EMNRD's initiative by transforming and cleaning up a site that was once dubbed a "methane super emitter" by federal officials. EMNRD's OCD has successfully plugged 138 orphan wells since October 2022, with the majority of funding stemming from the BIL. This accomplishment has not only curbed methane emissions by over 158,000 kilograms annually but has also prevented the release of 4,447 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year.

"In practical terms, that corresponds to 11.4 million miles driven by gasoline-powered vehicles or the carbon sequestration provided by 5,192 acres of forest in one year," said **EMNRD Deputy Secretary Dylan Fuge**.

The impact of EMNRD's work extends beyond mere statistics. The recent closure of a problematic site adjacent to an RV park in Carlsbad, featured in a [Department of Interior update](#), symbolizes the tangible benefits of the program. Prior to intervention, this site ranked among the county's most significant methane emitters. Now, it stands as a testament to EMNRD's commitment to environmental stewardship.

Operating with diligence and efficiency, EMNRD has allocated 90% of the initial \$25 million BIL grant for well plugging and reclamation activities by December 2022, meeting the grant's requirements. Furthermore, the agency has leveraged additional resources from the New Mexico Reclamation Fund to supplement ongoing efforts.

"This funding is making a meaningful difference on the ground by addressing problems left to taxpayers by irresponsible operators," said **Fuge**.

Initially, \$19.4M was allocated for well plugging and methane monitoring. The remaining \$5.6M has been dedicated to eight environmental remediation and surface reclamation projects, which are still ongoing. These projects have already removed over 80,000 cubic yards of oil-contaminated soil and produced water.

Throughout the same timeframe, the OCD has supplemented these federal funds with more than \$9 million from the New Mexico Reclamation Fund. These state funds serve multiple purposes: plugging additional wells, supporting large-scale remediation projects, and ensuring continuous employment for plugging contractors while EMNRD awaits the next allocation of BIL grant funds.

Looking ahead, EMNRD anticipates further funding opportunities through the BIL, with an estimated \$75 million to \$100 million earmarked for orphan well plugging and reclamation work. This commitment reflects a shared vision of environmental sustainability and responsible resource management.

EMNRD remains steadfast in its mission to mitigate environmental risks, protect public health, and foster a sustainable energy future. With continued support and collaboration, EMNRD is poised to build upon its successes, ensuring a brighter, cleaner tomorrow for New Mexico and beyond.

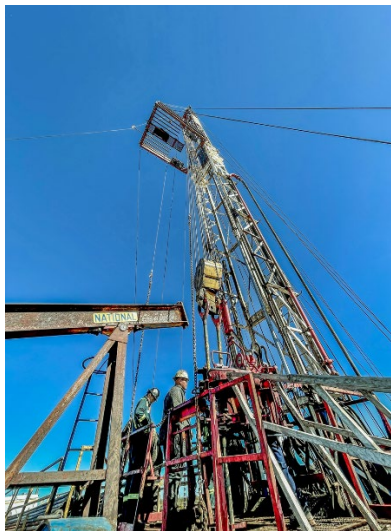
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Plugging crew with an orphan well.



Orphan well prior to plugging.



OCD SE NM Inspections Supervisor Gilbert Cordero witnessing methane monitoring at an orphan well.

*The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.*

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