Office of Oil & Gas Management Questions and Answers

- **What are the current number of filled positions in your program?**

  The Office of Oil and Gas Management complement currently includes 190 positions that are funded by the Oil and Gas Well Plugging Fund, DEP's Oil and Gas Operating Fund. The Governor's Office of the Budget implemented complement control measures on December 16, 2016, that reduced total complement for the Office of Oil and Gas Management from 226 positions to 190 positions: a staff reduction of 16%. Ten positions out of the 190 (5% of total complement) are funded by the Oil and Gas Well Plugging Fund but work in other DEP program areas that provide support to the Office of Oil and Gas Management, such as program counsel.

  Of the 190 positions, currently there are 78 field inspectors and 35 permit reviewers on staff. The balance of the Oil and Gas Complement are comprised of other professional, administrative and managerial positions.

  As a result of the passage of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the Department was awarded an Initial Grant of $25 million and 10 percent of the grant (i.e., $2.5 million) was used to pay administrative costs to run the program. The Office of Oil and Gas Management was authorized by the Governor's Budget Office/Office of Administration to add 41 positions to its complement for the purpose of implementing the IIJA grant program. The Office of Oil and Gas Management phased in the creation of these positions as the IIJA workload increased over time.

  As of December 2024, the Office of Oil and Gas Management has created and filled 39 of these positions. These new positions work on the implementation of the federal IIJA program since they are funded by IIJA grant dollars.

- **What are the number of authorized positions in your program?**

  See above response. The Office of Oil and Gas Management has filled all positions.

- **Is "full complement" still considered 226 as described in your 2022 three-year fee report if not what is currently considered "full complement"?**

  The current complement funded by the oil and gas state operating fund (Well Plugging Fund) is 190.

- **The 2022 three-year fee report referenced a need for 49 additional positions (p.11) Can you describe the number and type of positions currently needed?**

The 49 additional positions were a reference to a workload analysis performed in 2016. Since this time, the Oil and Gas Program has implemented technology changes to make operations more efficient. This includes mobile inspections, ePermitting, and electronic submission of data. While these advances help to overcome limited resources, the program has also identified opportunities and has been tasked with additional responsibilities. These include:

- Actively taking steps to develop, implement, and oversee an underground injection control program for the Geologic Sequestration of Carbon Dioxide
- Focusing on timely and appropriate enforcement actions against operators who illegally abandon their wells.
- Ensuring oversight and implementation of well plugging activities resulting from the federal funding opportunities such as the Orphan Well Plugging Grant Program and reimbursement grants associated with the Methane Emissions Reduction Program. In addition, program staff are heavily involved with documenting abandoned well locations and conditions, site remediation, and additional well plugging activities.

The Oil and Gas Program continues to evaluate program staffing needs and communicates with the Governor's Office to ensure goals and objectives are being met.

- **Can you describe how your program's operations would be improved with this additional staff.**

Ensuring the safety of Pennsylvania's residents and achieving compliance from the regulated industry with applicable regulations remain objectives of the Oil and Gas Program. With this in mind, it is imperative that the ability of the program to meet these objectives, including staffing needs, is continuously evaluated. The program remains vigilant in seeking improvements where they can be made and has been able to meet goals with existing staff.

- **Can you describe any new positions added in the current fiscal year. Can you indicate whether these new positions were for day-to-day operations of your program or were for special projects.**

On May 14, 2024, the U.S. Department of Energy awarded a $44,457,220 Methane Emissions Reduction Program (MERP) grant to DEP. The Office of Oil and Gas Management was authorized by the Governor's Budget Office/Office of Administration to add five positions to implement the MERP grant. In the most recent budget (FY2024-25), OOGM received 5 new positions, and the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) received two new positions to implement the new work associated with the $44 million awarded through the Methane Emissions Reduction Program. These five positions are funded with MERP grant dollars via the federal Inflation Reduction Act.

- **When do expect the next three-year fee report to be submitted?**
  - **Is a draft copy of this report available for my review?**

  The three-year fee report is currently under development by the Office of Oil and Gas Management and will be advanced and presented to EQB upon its completion. At this time, the Office does not have a draft copy available.

- **How much additional money does the Oil and Gas program need per year to carry out its duties in a responsible fashion?**

  The DEP Office of Oil and Gas Management is funded by way of unconventional and conventional permit application fees, $6 million annually from the Act 13 Oil and Gas Impact Fee and incidental fines and penalties collected as a result of violations of the Oil and Gas Act.

  The Department receives fees from permit applications under 25 Pa. Code Chapters 102 and 105 (relating to erosion and sediment control; and dam safety and waterway management), including the Erosion and Sediment Control General Permit. These fees are not currently distributed to the Office of Oil and Gas Management and are deposited into the Clean Water Fund. These fees are committed to funding critical operations that support County Conservation Districts as well as Department staff who, among other responsibilities, provide support and training to staff within the Oil and Gas Program that review Chapter 102 and Chapter 105 permit applications and inspect permitted projects.

  Permit fee surcharges were established by the Oil and Gas Act (Section 3271) to fund DEP's orphan and abandoned Well Plugging Program. A $250 surcharge is collected for a permit to drill a gas well and $150 to drill an oil well. The permit surcharges are not used to fund the administration of DEP's Oil and Gas Program, rather they are used exclusively to pay for plugging orphaned and abandoned wells in Pennsylvania. DEP's Oil and Gas Program incurs expenses charged to the Oil & Gas Operating Fund to administer well plugging activities, including project planning, contracting, and operations oversight.

  The cost to administer DEP's Oil and Gas Program by the Office of Oil and Gas Management is about $28 million annually. DEP collected $7.3 million in permit fees in FY2023-24 and as of mid-fiscal year 2024-25 is on track to collect about $7.2 million. This amount along with the $11 million budgeted in FY2024-25 provides a total of about $24.2 million.

- **What is your best estimate of the number of orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells in Pennsylvania?**

As of 1/21/2025, there are 27,125 DEP abandoned or DEP Orphan wells which have no viable responsible party documented in Pennsylvania. Many more orphan wells are undocumented. It is estimated that somewhere between 100,000 and 560,000 oil and gas wells remain unaccounted for in state records.

- **Can you give me an estimate of the number of oil and gas wells that have been abandoned in PA in the last three years?**

  Determining the actual date an oil and gas well becomes abandoned can be difficult due to timeframe in between onsite inspections. The program can say that since 1/1/2022, 1,569 unique wells were cited for abandonment. Of these wells, 1,154 had not been cited for abandonment prior to 2022. This does not necessarily indicate that the wells were abandoned within the three-year period.