



**Public Input of Virginia E. Palacios
Executive Director of Commission Shift
Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting
December 13, 2023**

We came to you with various requests and information throughout the year, and I'd like to review your progress on fulfilling our requests. First, there have been some improvements in transparency related to critical infrastructure and weatherization as well as providing language access.

Weatherization: the commission published a news release last year after a winter storm event that reported gas production volumes and gas storage volumes compared to residential and commercial gas demand and power plant gas demand.¹ We would like to continue seeing reports like this.

Language access: You provided some information in Spanish that is relevant to the public.² Thank you. We want to see much more Spanish language information easily accessible to the public. And we'd like to see interpretation provided at meetings as well.

Areas for improvement:

We have not seen enough improvement in several major areas. These include: orphaned wells, carbon dioxide injection rules, public engagement, the monitoring and enforcement plan, the draft waste pit rulemaking, and pipeline safety.

¹ Railroad Commission of Texas. Feb 6, 2023. Numbers Once Again Show Texas Gas Supply Held Strong During Wintry Weather.
<https://www.rrc.texas.gov/news/02062023-numbers-once-again-show-texas-gas-supply-held-strong-during-wintery-weather/>

² The Monitoring and Enforcement Plan (provided at the beginning of the comment period, instead of the end like last year), a notice about the Chapter 5 Carbon Dioxide rulemaking, and a synopsis of the waste pit and recycling rule informal draft changes.

The number of inactive unplugged wells peaked at 167,000 in Nov. 2022 and then came down to 149,000 in March 2023,³ where it essentially stayed all year. The number of inactive wells operators plugged per month was surprisingly consistent (600 - 800 per month),⁴ which could indicate that the number of operator-plugged wells are a function of enforcement staff capacity at the commission. Increasing staff capacity to enforce inactive well plugging requirements may be an efficient way to prevent orphaned wells, which have not significantly declined in the past year.⁵ Additionally, we never heard a response from the commission about why thousands of wells owned by barred operators are not included on the orphaned wells list.

Overall, we've made detailed comments summarizing concerns of impacted community members on draft rulemakings related to carbon dioxide injection wells and waste pits, as well as the draft monitoring and enforcement plan. The bulk of these comments were ignored. We need you to have a willingness to involve the public differently than you have in the past. I realize that is difficult in bureaucracy, but it's important that the efforts of your agency provide a meaningful public service that reflects all of the values in your mission statement including stewardship of natural resources and the environment and concern for personal and community safety. Thank you for the opportunity to give Public Input, and I will see you again in the New Year.

³ Railroad Commission. Well Distribution Tables.

<https://www.rrc.texas.gov/oil-and-gas/research-and-statistics/well-information/well-distribution-tables/>

⁴ Aside from August 2023, when operators plugged more than 1,000 wells. Operators are on track to plug about 8,800 inactive wells in calendar year 2023. See: Railroad Commission. Monthly Drilling, Completion, and Plugging Summaries.

<https://www.rrc.texas.gov/oil-and-gas/research-and-statistics/drilling-information/monthly-drilling-completion-and-plugging-summaries/>

⁵ Calendar year 2023 began with 8,500 orphaned wells. RRC plugged 1,500, and there are still 8,100 on the list as of the end of October 2023. See: Railroad Commission. Commissioner's State Managed Plugging Monthly Reports.

<https://www.rrc.texas.gov/oil-and-gas/environmental-cleanup-programs/oil-gas-regulation-and-cleanup-fund/state-managed-plugging-monthly-reports/>