

**SHORT GUIDES TO  
COMPLAINTS  
& INSPECTIONS  
AT THE  
RAILROAD  
COMMISSION  
OF TEXAS**

 **COMMISSION SHIFT**



The University of Texas at Austin  
Environmental Clinic  
*School of Law*

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## Introduction

Oil and gas production stretches across the state of Texas, often in close proximity to or on the property of those who may be negatively impacted and do not benefit financially from production.

While operators are expected to minimize their impacts on surface owners and nearby residents, this is not always the case, and impacted neighbors need to know where to go to make complaints to our regulatory authorities when problems arise. These guides, developed by Commission Shift and the University of Texas School of Law Environmental Clinic, are designed to be a reference to help anyone concerned about nearby activity know where to go and how to file a complaint with the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC), our state oil and gas agency. Note that oversight of oil and gas is split between the RRC and the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and this guide offers an overview on what complaints usually fall within the RRC's jurisdiction. It provides guidance on what information is helpful to report to the RRC and how to prepare for an inspection. It also offers tips for navigating the RRC's website.

These guides are available as printed versions and on Commission Shift's website, which includes hyperlinks for ease of use. Please use the QR codes available within the printed versions to visit the online version and make use of hyperlinks.

You can also view the full guide on Commission Shift's website by navigating to [bit.ly/RRCGuides](https://bit.ly/RRCGuides).



[bit.ly/RRCGuides](https://bit.ly/RRCGuides)

Sometimes websites or reporting procedures change. Commission Shift will update information online as we become aware of changes. If you have suggestions for improvements to this guide, please email them to [commish@commissionshift.org](mailto:commish@commissionshift.org).

*This report does not represent the views of The University of Texas School of Law or The University of Texas at Austin. The information provided reflects the research and views of the individual authors only. This report is not legal advice and should not be used as a substitute for the advice of an attorney.*

## The Railroad Commission’s Jurisdiction

In order for the Railroad Commission (RRC), the state oil and gas oversight agency, to address your concern, it must fall within the agency’s authority. When it comes to oil and gas development, the RRC oversees activities related to the exploration and production, pipeline safety, underground injection of produced water or carbon dioxide, and surface disposal of oil and gas waste. The RRC also has authority over other types of mining, underground injection, and pipelines that will not be discussed in this guide.

<b>Types of complaints about oil &amp; gas activities that are usually under RRC jurisdiction</b>	
<b>Complaint/Issue</b>	<b>Descriptions/Examples of Issue</b>
Abandoned Equipment	<p>An oil &amp; gas well or facility closes, and the operator leaves behind equipment it should remove.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 year of inactivity: the operator must disconnect electricity.</li> <li>• 5-10 years of inactivity: the operator must purge all fluids onsite.</li> <li>• 10+ years of inactivity: the operator has to remove equipment.</li> </ul> <p>The RRC might not investigate if the facility does not meet these duration requirements for inactivity.</p>
Breakout	<p>Breakout is the uncontrolled escape of fluids into undesired locations underground. Breakouts may be caused by a casing leak in a disposal well, an unplugged oil or gas well, or a poorly plugged well, causing hydrocarbons or salt to travel into freshwater aquifers or emerge at the surface as a geyser or pool of fluid. The RRC will not recognize a breakout as a violation of their rules unless they can observe it. This is easiest when the breakout is at the surface, but sometimes pressure tests downhole in an injection well or oil and gas well can also help.</p>
Hydrogen Sulfide (H <sub>2</sub> S)	<p>Hydrogen sulfide is a toxic, deadly gas that may be present at drilling locations, producing wells, tank batteries, production facilities, gas plants, pipelines, etc. Operators must take precautions to protect the general public from releases of H<sub>2</sub>S resulting from their operations. A breakout of gas with or without H<sub>2</sub>S is considered a violation.</p>
Inactive Wells	<p>An inactive well is an oil and gas well with an active operator, but that has had no production or permitted activity for greater than 12 months. Although inactive wells are technically required to be plugged within 12 months of ceasing production, state law allows operators to obtain well plugging extensions almost indefinitely.</p>
Injection/Disposal Wells	<p>Injection wells may be used to dispose of saltwater produced from oil and gas wells, or to stimulate the production of more oil or gas from a spent well. Complaints can be made about injection wells that inject above the permitted pressure or that lack the necessary mechanical integrity (meaning fluid may be leaking outside the injection zone).</p>

Leak/Spill (Active)	An oil or gas facility spilling or leaking contaminants puts groundwater at risk. An operator must report any spill of crude oil into water to the RRC and remedy the spill.
Pipeline Safety	The RRC oversees leaks and incidents related to natural gas and hazardous liquids pipelines in Texas. Leaks should be reported to the operator first, so that they can respond quickly to the incident. If you are unsure who the operator is, you can report the incident to the RRC. Although the agency collects information about pipelines in the state, it has no authority to make decisions over the siting or locations of pipelines.
Waste Pits	Waste pits are commonly used to store, dispose of, or recycle drilling waste and byproducts from the oilfield. Common issues include soil and groundwater contamination from spillage overflowing from the pit, harmful emissions from the processing of inappropriate materials, and risks to public health due to contamination. Odors or air quality-related issues should be reported to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Potential groundwater contamination issues or runoff from the facility should be reported to the RRC.
Pollution	Pollution is defined as any unauthorized contamination of surface or subsurface water or land from active or abandoned well sites or oil and gas waste.
Seismic Activity	Seismic activity (earthquakes) has been directly correlated with injection into faults. This injection is typically for the disposal of produced water, but can sometimes be a result of hydraulic fracturing.
Signs	The RRC requires operators to have 24-inch wide by 12-inch tall signs at the entrance to the property and at each well and tank battery that include the operator's name and the lease name (plus the well number, if applicable). Not clearly displaying a sign is a rule violation.
Venting & Flaring	<p>The RRC provides rule exceptions or "permits" for flaring. The commission allows flaring during drilling and for 10 days after completion, and it grants extensions and exceptions ranging from 45 to 180 days (over 180 days requires a Final Order). Venting is generally not allowed, except in specific circumstances for safety reasons. If you are unsure, it is okay to report it to the RRC and let them make the determination of whether the activity was allowed or not.</p> <p>Odors, excessive smoke, or unlit flare stacks should be reported to the TCEQ. A properly operating flare should have some smoky marbling, but not thick black smoke. If a flare has no smoke, it may be failing to combust harmful toxins like hydrogen sulfide, and should be reported to the TCEQ.</p>

<p>Water Well</p>	<p>The RRC has jurisdiction over water supply wells used for oil and gas development that penetrate the base of usable quality water. Most water matters fall under the purview of the TCEQ and are also overseen by local groundwater conservation districts. More information on what water use is associated with Oil &amp; Gas Activities and what roles are filled by other government entities can be found on the RRC website.</p> <p>If you believe your water well has been contaminated by oil, gas, or pipeline facilities, you should make a report to the RRC.</p>
<p>Wellhead Control</p>	<p>A wellhead is the component at the surface of a well that produces the oil or gas. A wellhead control system is primarily used to prevent uncontrolled releases of oil, gas, or drilling fluids during operations that could lead to blowouts or other hazards. Any release of fluid or gas through the wellhead is a violation. Take a picture of the wellhead leak when you notice it. You can download one of several apps which will add a timestamp and location to photos you take. This will record useful information for reporting the incident and ensuring the RRC and/or the operator can correct the problem.</p>

For a more detailed description of how the Railroad Commission and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) split jurisdiction over the oil and gas industry, you can read their Memorandum of Understanding, which is codified in Statewide Rule 30.



*Memorandum of Understanding Between the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)*

If you're unsure whether something falls under the RRC's authority or not, **you may still reach out to the RRC and report the issue.** When you ask clear and concise questions, the RRC should be able to tell you if something falls under their jurisdiction or not. If the issue is not within their authority, you can ask which agency does have authority over the issue. Remember to be clear, patient, and persistent throughout this process.

If you aren't referred to another agency, you may still want to contact one of the other agencies that handles environmental concerns like the TCEQ, which handles issues with air quality, surface water, water wells, and soil contamination that is not related to oil and gas activity – or your local government and law enforcement, which may be able to help with issues related to litter and illegal dumping, noise, and traffic and dust on public roads.

## How to File a Complaint

If you observe a leak or issue with an oil and gas well, you should report it to the Railroad Commission (RRC) so that they can investigate. The operator must address any issues with active or inactive wells under their lease. The RRC is responsible for any wells orphaned to the state by delinquent operators.

1. Prepare your information.
  - a. Included in this guide are tools you can use to help you gather and organize information about the incident or issue before you make your complaint:
    - i. **Incident Information Checklist for What to Report to the Railroad Commission** (see page 9)
    - ii. **Gathering and Finding Information on RRC's website** (see page 14)
    - iii. **Checking on Orphaned Wells and Reporting Undocumented Wells** (see page 15)
2. For emergencies, call 911.
  - a. If life or property is in immediate danger, call 911. Be ready to provide the address or clear directions on how to access the site.
  - b. Otherwise, contact the RRC district office for the county where the incident is occurring.
3. Contact your RRC district office.
  - a. Locate your district office (on the RRC's website, go to About Us → Locations → District Offices by County).
  - b. Put your complaint in writing.
    - i. Email your complaint to your district office, or fill out the General Complaint Form (on the RRC's website, go to Complaints → General Complaints) to ensure you have a paper trail and so you can attach any photos or relevant documents that may be helpful in the inspector's investigation.
    - ii. Note: the RRC will not be able to use the evidence you provide to issue a violation, but it may help the inspector plan the investigation.
  - c. Follow up with a phone call.
    - i. Call to speak to a person to ensure the RRC received your complaint and to see if you need to follow up with anyone else at the RRC or in a different agency, such as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).
4. Make it "formal."
  - a. Say you want to make a "formal" complaint, request an inspection, and request that the RRC follow up with you on the inspection and any potential violations.
  - b. Making a "formal" complaint may make your name subject to an open records request by the company or other members of the public, but it is the only way for the RRC to follow up with you about the case, and for you to make sure the RRC documents the investigation and follows through with it.
  - c. Provide your contact information to the RRC so they can follow up with you.
5. Provide location information to the RRC.
  - a. Include the API number, lease number, address, and GPS coordinates if you have these available.

- b. Refer to *How to locate the API number and Lease number* in our **Incident Information Checklist** (see page 9). You should still file a complaint, even if you cannot find this information.

**WARNING:** It's important not to endanger yourself while investigating an issue. If you believe there's an issue with a well on your property, file your complaint so that an RRC inspector can investigate it, rather than potentially endangering yourself. Toxic gases like hydrogen sulfide can quickly cause death and are not visible or odorous at high concentrations. Collect photos from the safety of a closed vehicle parked a safe distance away and describe the issue as best you can so that an inspector can investigate further.

6. Provide photo documentation to the RRC.
  - a. Take photos while a leak is occurring, in case it dries up by the time an inspector comes by.
  - b. Take a picture of the problem when you notice it. You can download one of several apps which will add a timestamp and location to photos you take.
7. Document important information.
  - a. Refer to Section 4 of the **Incident Information Checklist** (see page 12).
  - b. When you make a formal complaint, you should receive a complaint number. You can use this number to search for any inspections that result from your complaint by searching the RRC's Online Inspection Lookup tool (on the RRC's website, go to Resources → Resource Center → Research Queries → "Launch Application" next to "RRC Online Inspection Lookup" at the bottom of the page). A short user guide for the tool is available by clicking "Learn More" instead of "Launch Application" when following these steps.
  - c. If you did not receive a complaint number, your complaint may not have been recorded as a formal complaint, and you may need to make an additional complaint. It is helpful to submit complaints in writing via email so that you can establish documentation.
8. Request to attend a re-inspection.
  - a. If you are the surface landowner, you can request to attend a re-inspection.
  - b. RRC staff might not notify you when they conduct the first inspection. For more information about what to expect, review **Preparing for an Inspection** (see page 18).
9. Answer your phone and follow up promptly.
  - a. If you are waiting to hear back from the RRC (to speak with an inspector and provide more information, for example), be aware that the RRC might only contact you once to follow up. They may close the case after that attempt if they do not hear back, so make sure to check your email and voicemail regularly. You can also contact your district office for updates.

Refer to **After Filing a Complaint & the Inspection Process** (see page 19) for more on what happens next.

# Incident Information Checklist for What to Report to the Railroad Commission

This checklist provides a useful tool for gathering information to document for yourself and for use in incident reports or complaints you will file with the Railroad Commission (RRC). You do not need all of this information to make a report, but you should at least be able to provide a description of your concerns and enough information for the RRC to locate the problem. If it is safe, a photo may also be helpful for the investigator.

## Section 1: Incident Details

1. **Date of Incident, or first time you noticed it:**

2. **Time of Day (approximate):**

3. **Location of Incident:**

- Take a picture of the problem when you notice it. You can download one of several apps that will add a timestamp and location to your picture.
- Street address or nearest crossroad:
- City/County:
- GPS Coordinates, if available:
- A description of how to access the site, if an address is insufficient:
  
- Is this on or near your property?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure

4. **Operator / Lease Information, if available (see *How to locate an API number or lease number* on page 12 for assistance):**

- Operator:
- API number:
- Lease number:
- Well number:

**5. Type of Site or Activity Involved:**

- Oil Well
- Gas Well
- Injection Well
- Orphaned Well
- Inactive Well
- Pipeline
- Produced Water Storage Tank
- Condensate Storage Tank
- Compressor Station
- Flaring
- Waste Pit
- Electrical line
- Truck hauling waste or fluid
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What did you observe? (Mark all that apply.)**

- Foul smell
- Unusual noise
- Visible smoke or flames
- Invisible gasses (mirage effect)
- Hissing sound
- Leak or spill
- Dead animals or plants
- Shaking or rumbling sensation
- Health Symptoms
  - Headache
  - Nausea
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Sneezing
  - Itchy, runny nose
  - Burning eyes or nose
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe what you saw, smelled or experienced:

## Section 2: Impacts and Health Symptoms

7. Did this incident potentially affect you, your family, or your property in any of the following ways?

- If yes, check all that apply
  - Health Symptoms
  - Property damage
  - Water or air contamination
  - Livestock or crop impact
  - Other:

- No
- Not sure

8. If health symptoms occurred, please describe them and who experienced them. *(Include symptoms, how long they lasted, and whether medical attention was needed)*

## Section 3: Documentation

9. Do you have any documentation of the incident?

- Photos
- Videos
- Medical records
- Log of incidents/notes
- None
- Other

10. Have you reported this incident to any state agencies or authorities?

- Which agency or agencies did you contact and when? Example: the RRC, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), local health department, local emergency response, etc.
  - Name of Agency:
  
  - Date reported:
  
  - Case number:
  
  - Response from the agency:

#### Section 4: Document your complaint.

Make sure to document the following when you make your complaint:

11. Date(s) you made your complaint, and method:

- Email to my district office:
- Phone call to my district office:
- General Complaint Form on the RRC website (see **How to File a Complaint** on page 7 for steps on how to find the form)
- Other:

12. Name of the RRC representative you spoke with, if you called:

13. Did you tell the RRC that your complaint was “formal?”

14. What contact information did you give the RRC?

- Name
- Phone
- Email
- Mailing Address

15. What date can you expect the RRC to follow up with you?

16. Complaint number:

#### How to locate an API number or lease number

There are a few places to look for well information:

- At the physical well location
- Online:
  - RRC Public GIS Viewer
    - On the RRC’s website ([rrc.texas.gov](http://rrc.texas.gov)), click Resources → Resource Center → GIS Viewer (Map) → Launch Public GIS Viewer.
    - In the top toolbar, click the question mark button for a user guide on how to use the GIS viewer.
  - RRC Oil and Gas Data Queries
    - On the RRC’s website ([rrc.texas.gov](http://rrc.texas.gov)), click Resources → Resource Center → Research Queries. Click Learn More after each query to read more about specific queries.
    - When clicking into the online system query application, click on each query and the “help” button at the top left of the page for instructions.

You can use the API number or a well’s location coordinates (latitude and longitude) with the online tools listed above to determine the operational status and other information about the well.

## At the physical well location

1. While on location, look around the well site for a sign that displays an operator name, lease name, and an API number.
  - a. If there's no identifying information on a sign at the site, you can determine the well's location coordinates using GPS tools on a smartphone or tablet. You may visit a GPS coordinate website or app when you are standing next to the well to find these coordinates.
  - b. Documenting road addresses and landmarks may also be useful.

## Online

2. RRC Public GIS Viewer
  - a. With an API number, address, or location coordinates in hand, open the RRC Public GIS viewer.
  - b. In the upper right hand search box, type in the address or coordinates. When you press enter, the application will zoom into the location you entered. You can adjust your zoom level as needed.
  - c. Look for a symbol near your location. A legend on the left side of the screen will help you determine what the symbols mean. You can hover over each symbol to learn more information about the well, such as API number, Lease number, operator information, well type, and more.
  - d. If the well is not in the RRC's system, you may have located an unknown oil or gas well that needs to be reported to the RRC, or you may have identified a water well. Follow the steps to report it as outlined in **Checking on Orphaned Wells and Reporting Undocumented Wells** (see page 15).

## Gathering and Finding Information on the Railroad Commission Website

The Railroad Commission (RRC) website is full of information, but it may be challenging to use. Our resource to help navigate the RRC's website with hyperlinks to key pages and tools is available online – go to [bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite](https://bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite) or scan the QR code below.



[bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite](https://bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite)

**DISCLAIMER:** RRC applications are subject to changes that may render this information outdated. We will do our best to keep our online guide up-to-date.

You can use the RRC website to locate information about wells, waste pits, and other RRC activities.

Some of the website's most helpful tools and pages include:

- The GISViewer provides a map of wells and infrastructure under the RRC's jurisdiction. Clicking on specific locations provides a wealth of information about the infrastructure at a location.
- RRC's Online Inspection Lookup (OIL) tool allows you to review inspection and violation records for a given location.
- You can find contact information for local district offices to make a complaint, request an inspection, or ask any other questions about a well or lease. You can also make a complaint online using their complaint form.
- The website contains additional information about specific drilling permits and contested case hearings, individual operators, flaring and venting exception requests, and more about specific sites.
- The available data visualization tools allow you to review research and statistics for county and statewide information about drilling permits, oil and gas permits, clean up data, and more.
- You can also make open records requests and learn more about permitting, RRC rules, and participation in public rulemakings as well as providing public input.

Go to [bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite](https://bit.ly/UsingTheRRCWebsite) or scan the QR code to use Commission Shift's navigation support with site links for the RRC's website.

# Checking on Orphaned Wells and Reporting Undocumented Wells

## Check the Prioritization of Orphaned Wells on the Railroad Commission's Plugging List

If you have an orphaned well on your property and want to find out if it will be plugged in the near future, you can look up its prioritization status on the Railroad Commission (RRC) website. If the well isn't on the list below, you can also call your district office and ask to talk to the lead plugger.

1. Go to the State Managed Well Plugging webpage (on the RRC website, go to Oil and Gas → Environmental Cleanup → State Managed Well Plugging) and click "Wells Remaining to be Plugged with State Managed Funds." This list is updated periodically, and changes as the state plugs wells and new orphaned wells are added.
  - a. See the RRC's "Well Plugging Prioritization System" document to learn what the priority codes mean. To find this document on the RRC website, go to Oil and Gas → Environmental Cleanup → Federally Funded Well Plugging (not to be confused with "Federally Funded (IIJA) Well Plugging" in the Data Visualization sidebar) → Well Plugging Prioritization System, or use the search function available at the top of the page.

## Report an Undocumented Well

If you can't find a well or it's not in their system, call your district office to make a formal complaint about the well and tell them as much location information as possible.

In rare instances, very old wells are unknown to the RRC and need to be reported so they are documented and attended to. Undocumented wells could be oil and gas wells, water wells, or other types of mineral development wells.

1. Follow the steps to locate an API or Lease number and check the status of a well to verify no records exist on the RRC's website for the well.
  - a. Take a picture of the problem when you notice it. You can download one of several apps which will add a timestamp and location to photos you take.
2. Check with the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to see if they have a record of a water well at that location. Note that water well maps are also incomplete in Texas.
  - a. To locate wells by map, go to the TWDB website ([twdb.texas.gov](http://twdb.texas.gov)) and click Data & Apps → Groundwater Data Viewer.
  - b. To look for water well records, go to TCEQ's website ([tceq.texas.gov](http://tceq.texas.gov)) and click Water → Drinking Water → Finding Information About Water Wells in Texas.
4. If you cannot find the well in either database, you may report the well to both agencies.

- a. Use the chart on page 17 to locate and call your RRC district office and make an official complaint, and state that you'd like to report an unknown oil or gas well.
- b. Follow the instructions on TWDB's website to report an abandoned water well. To find the instructions, go to [twdb.texas.gov](http://twdb.texas.gov) and click Groundwater → FAQ → "General Groundwater and Private Water Well Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)" → Abandoned Water Wells/Groundwater Contamination → "How can I report a deteriorated or abandoned water well?".

## Locating Your RRC District Office

District	City	Address	Phone/FAX
1	San Antonio	112 E. Pecan Street, Suite 705, San Antonio, TX 78205 san_antonio@rrc.texas.gov	210-227-1313 210-227-4822
2	San Antonio	112 E. Pecan Street, Suite 705, San Antonio, TX 78205 san_antonio@rrc.texas.gov	210-227-1313 210-227-4822
3	Houston	1919 N Loop West, Suite 620, Houston, TX 77008 Houston@rrc.texas.gov	713-869-5001 713-869-9621
4	Corpus Christi	10320 I-37, Corpus Christi, TX 78410 Corpus_Christi@rrc.texas.gov	361-242-3113 361-242-9613
5	Henderson	100 Bane Blvd, Henderson, TX 75652 kilgore@rrc.texas.gov	903-655-1840
6	Henderson	100 Bane Blvd, Henderson, TX 75652 kilgore@rrc.texas.gov	903-655-1840
7B	Abilene	1969 Industrial Blvd, Abilene, TX 79602 Abilene@rrc.texas.gov	325-692-0404 325-692-0273
7C	San Angelo	622 South Oakes St, Suite J, San Angelo, TX 76903 san_angelo@rrc.texas.gov	325-657-7450 325-657-7455
8	Midland	10 Desta Dr, Suite 500 E, Midland, TX 79705 midland@rrc.texas.gov	432-684-5581 432-684-6005
8A	Lubbock	6302 Iola Avenue, Suite 600, Lubbock, TX 79424 DOLubbock8A@rrc.texas.gov	806-698-6509 806-698-6532
9	Wichita Falls	5800 Kell Blvd, Suite 300, Wichita Falls, TX 76310 wichita_falls@rrc.texas.gov	940-723-2153 940-723-5088
10	Pampa	200 West Foster, Room 300, Pampa, TX 79065 pampa@rrc.texas.gov	806-665-1653 806-665-4217

Scan this QR code or go to the RRC’s website and click About Us → Locations → District Office Map to be taken to a map with Texas counties and their corresponding district numbers.



[rrc.texas.gov/media/3bkhbut0/districts\\_color\\_8x11.pdf](http://rrc.texas.gov/media/3bkhbut0/districts_color_8x11.pdf)

## Preparing for an Inspection

When an inspector comes to review a site due to a complaint, it is helpful to organize your information and prepare questions to make the visit more productive.

### Information to have readily available

1. Your description of the problem and what you think is causing it
2. Location of the problem or potential pollution and the potential source
3. Identifying information of the facility, if any
4. Dates when you first noticed the problem and when any changes were observed
5. Photos or other documentation of the problem
  - a. Note: The Railroad Commission (RRC) will not accept evidence you provide, but photos may help the investigator to understand your concerns and determine what they should do to collect their own evidence.

### Questions to ask the inspector

1. What is your typical process for investigating complaints like this?
2. If they have to take a water sample:
  - a. What sampling protocol are you using?
  - b. What will you ask the laboratory to test for?
3. How can I get the results of this inspection and any samples that were taken?
4. What information would you need to determine whether a rule was violated?
5. If I'm not satisfied with the results of the first inspection, how can I ensure that this issue is fully investigated?

### What to expect

1. Most likely, the inspector will not call you to ask permission to enter your property or provide notification for the time of the inspection.
2. Landowners are allowed to be present on a re-inspection. You can and should request that via the RRC district office. You can locate contact information for the district office for your county by going to the RRC website and clicking About Us → Locations.
3. The RRC may not act on your complaint if it falls outside of the RRC's jurisdiction (*see page 4*). RRC rules tend to favor oil and gas operators, and inspectors are trained to complete minimal tasks as part of an inspection.
4. When landowners or affected people ask questions, make clear requests, and stay persistent, their issues are more likely to be resolved. It takes time and requires patience.

## After Filing a Complaint and the Inspection Process

### Have you heard back from the Railroad Commission?

1. **Be responsive.** Make sure to check your email or voicemail. Contact your district office (see *page 17*) for an update if you haven't heard back within one week.
  - a. If Railroad Commission (RRC) staff contact you and don't hear back, they may not have the information they need to properly investigate your complaint, and they might close the complaint.
2. **You may hear nothing.** It's possible you won't hear from the RRC at all. Sometimes inspectors will not contact you unless they have trouble finding the location. Many times, RRC staff are not allowed to consider evidence presented by complainants when issuing a violation. However, the inspector may have some clarifying questions for you.
3. **Use your complaint number.** If you made a formal complaint, you should have received a complaint number. You can use this number to search the complaint in the RRC Inspections database.
  1. To search for your complaint, use the RRC's Oil Inspection Lookup (OIL) tool. On the RRC's website, go to Resources → Resource Center → Research Queries → "Launch Application" next to RRC Online Inspection Lookup at the bottom of the page. A short user guide for the tool is available by clicking "Learn More" instead of "Launch Application" when following these steps.
  2. If you cannot find inspections related to your complaint number in the database, you can email [open.records@rrc.texas.gov](mailto:open.records@rrc.texas.gov) to request the information.
4. **Refile your complaint, if needed.** If you did not receive a complaint number, your complaint may not have been recorded as an official complaint.
  - You may need to make an additional complaint. Make sure to explicitly call it a "formal" complaint, and provide your name and contact information to the RRC. Tell the RRC representative that you would like to be followed up with about the status of the complaint.
  - For instructions on how to file a complaint to the RRC, refer to **How to File a Complaint** (see *page 7*).
5. **Report to the correct agency.** Your complaint may fall outside of the RRC's jurisdiction (see *page 4*), and you may need to follow up with another agency. Don't count on the RRC to forward your complaint to the relevant agency. The agencies typically do not communicate with one another.

### The inspection

If an issue falls within the RRC's jurisdiction, they may schedule an inspection.

1. **Attending the inspection.**
  - a. RRC does not ask complainants if they want to attend the inspection, so you will need to ask the RRC representative about this when you make the complaint.

- b. If you own the property or otherwise have permission to be on the property, you may have an opportunity to attend the inspection, as long as you are not trespassing.
- c. RRC might prevent you from attending the inspection due to safety concerns.
- d. If you plan to attend, consider preparing some questions for the inspector. For guidance, refer to the relevant section of **Preparing for an Inspection** (see page 18).

## 2. What if there was no inspection?

- a. The issue might have been one that was resolved without inspection, such as through a records search.
- b. For example, if the complaint is about an oil well that is no longer producing, an inspector can review the production records online rather than conducting an on-site inspection.
- c. Did you provide sufficient location information in your complaint so that the inspector can locate the issue? Sometimes inspectors need more information to locate the problem.
- d. Contact your district office if you have questions why there was no inspection.

## After an inspection

1. You can look up information about the inspection in the RRC Online Inspection Lookup tool.
  - a. To find your specific inspection, you can input any of the following: Complaint #, API #, Operator Name or #, Drilling Permit #, Oil and Gas District, County, or Lease Name or #.
2. You should receive a status letter. This letter should update you on whether any violations were found, and if so, which enforcement actions will be taken against the operator.
  - a. You should receive a status letter within 2 weeks or 30 days after the initial inspection. If you have not received a status update, please contact your district office to request an update.
4. If you received a status letter that said no violations were found, and you believe the problem is still occurring:
  - a. Make another complaint.
  - b. Go directly to the operator to try and resolve the issue.
5. If you received a status letter that said the operator was noncompliant:
  - a. What deadline/notification were they given?
    - i. Did the operator fix the issue by this deadline?
  - b. Was a reinspection scheduled?
    - i. Contact your district office if you would like to request to attend a reinspection.
3. If the RRC decides to pursue an Enforcement Action against the operator, you should get a letter notifying you that your case is being referred to the RRC's Legal Enforcement Section. At that time, your complaint will be "closed," but Legal Enforcement will proceed with a docketed case number.
  - i. Any questions/requests for updates you have at this point should be directed at the RRC's Legal Enforcement Section, who can be reached at 512-463-6762.
  - ii. You may consider seeking legal counsel if you are directly impacted to ensure your rights are properly represented.