



**Public Input of Julie Range
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Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting
August 18, 2026**

The Railroad Commission is on the precipice of a rulemaking that will have far-reaching impacts on groundwater, air quality, and both operators' and taxpayers' pocketbooks. It is needed because we have an aging population of unplugged, inactive wells that are rusting away and that, with time, are more complex and costly to plug. These wells may also become pathways for pressurized produced water to flow to the surface, or worse—to unknowingly pollute our freshwater aquifers. Emergency flowing wells are also expensive to plug.

The Legislature, through SB 1150, attempted to address these problems by requiring operators to plug wells over 25 years old and 15 years inactive. However, the bill allows exceptions, such as giving operators a reasonable timeframe to achieve compliance. But we urge the Railroad Commission to carefully consider two of these exceptions when crafting the rules.

To prevent indefinite loopholes, Commission Shift encourages the Commission to set clear criteria for what qualifies for a plugging exception. Operators should produce in paying quantities and meet other metrics to qualify as 'returning to operation'. Similarly, companies claiming a 'financial hardship' should be able to demonstrate, with reported detailed financial information, that they have a viable path to eventually plug their wells and are contributing toward decommissioning costs.

Furthermore, the Commission should establish caps on the number of extensions allowed for operators claiming 'financial hardship' or a history of 'returning wells to operation'. Extending plugging deadlines for old wells indefinitely puts Texas groundwater at risk.

These recommendations and more were developed with a working group we assembled of landowners, Groundwater Conservation Districts, oil and gas attorneys, and many who work in the oil and gas industry.

Our group stresses that the legislature stated that “the RRC **shall** consider: the risk to public safety, health, and the environment, wellbore integrity [...] casing pressure; and regional risk considerations, including [...] penetration of corrosive or over-pressured formations and [...] zones containing hydrogen sulfide.”

And we want to stress that extensions are a privilege, not a right. Statute uses a permissive “may” to indicate that the RRC is not required to grant extensions. Some areas of the state and well conditions may warrant denying extensions. Furthermore, under the statutory language, such extension denials can extend to wells inactive for under 15 years whenever these risks arise.

As you build the rules, we encourage the Commission to engage the public meaningfully through in-district public hearings, consider public comments, and build a strong protective rule with clear metrics that safeguard human health and the environment.