

**TITLE 19        NATURAL RESOURCES AND WILDLIFE**  
**CHAPTER 15    OIL AND GAS**  
**PART 25        PLUGGING AND ABANDONMENT OF WELLS**

**19.15.25.1        ISSUING AGENCY:** Oil Conservation Commission.  
[19.15.25.1 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.1 NMAC, 12/1/2008; A, 1/15/2019]

**19.15.25.2        SCOPE:** 19.15.25 NMAC applies to persons that operate oil or gas wells within New Mexico.  
[19.15.25.2 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.2 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.3        STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 19.15.25 NMAC is adopted pursuant to the Oil and Gas Act, Section 70-2-12 NMSA 1978, which authorizes the division to require dry or abandoned wells to be plugged so as to confine oil, gas or water in the strata in which they are found and to prevent them from escaping into other strata.  
[19.15.25.3 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.3 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.4        DURATION:** Permanent.  
[19.15.25.4 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.4 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.5        EFFECTIVE DATE:** December 1, 2008, unless a later date is cited at the end of a section.  
[19.15.25.5 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.5 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.6        OBJECTIVE:** To establish requirements for properly abandoning and plugging wells drilled for oil or gas or service wells including seismic, core, exploration or injection wells or placing the wells in temporary abandonment in order to protect public health, fresh water and the environment.  
[19.15.25.6 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.6 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.7        DEFINITIONS:** [RESERVED]  
[See 19.15.2.7 NMAC for definitions.]

**19.15.25.8        WELLS TO BE PROPERLY ABANDONED:**

**A.** The operator of wells drilled for oil or gas or services wells including seismic, core, exploration or injection wells, whether cased or uncased, shall plug the wells as Subsection B of 19.15.25.8 NMAC requires.

**B.** The operator shall either properly plug and abandon a well or place the well in approved temporary abandonment in accordance with 19.15.25 NMAC within 90 days after:

- (1) a 60 day period following suspension of drilling operations;
- (2) a determination that a well is no longer usable for beneficial purposes; or
- (3) a period of one year in which a well has been continuously inactive.

[19.15.25.8 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.201 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.9        NOTICE OF PLUGGING:**

**A.** The operator shall file notice of intention to plug with the division on form C-103 prior to commencing plugging operations. The notice shall provide all the information 19.15.7.14 NMAC requires including operator and well identification and proposed procedures for plugging the well.

**B.** In addition, the operator shall provide a well bore diagram showing the proposed plugging procedure.

**C.** The operator shall notify the division 24 hours prior to commencing plugging operations. In the case of a newly drilled dry hole, the operator may obtain verbal approval from the appropriate district supervisor or the district supervisor's representative of the plugging method and time operations are to begin. The operator shall file written notice in accordance with 19.15.25.11 NMAC with the division within 10 days after the district supervisor has given verbal approval.

[19.15.25.9 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.202 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.10       PLUGGING:**

**A.** Before an operator abandons a well, the operator shall plug the well in a manner that permanently confines all oil, gas and water in the separate strata in which they are originally found. The operator may accomplish this by using mud-laden fluid, cement and plugs singly or in combination as approved by the division on

the notice of intention to plug.

**B.** The operator shall mark the exact location of plugged and abandoned wells with a steel marker not less than four inches in diameter set in cement and extending at least four feet above mean ground level. The operator name, lease name and well number and location, including unit letter, section, township and range, shall be welded, stamped or otherwise permanently engraved into the marker's metal. A person shall not build permanent structures preventing access to the wellhead over a plugged and abandoned well without the division's written approval. A person shall not remove a plugged and abandonment marker without the division's written approval.

**C.** The operator may use below-ground plugged and abandonment markers only with the division's written approval when an above-ground marker would interfere with agricultural endeavors. The below-ground marker shall have a steel plate welded onto the abandoned well's surface or conductor pipe and shall be at least three feet below the ground surface and of sufficient size so that all the information 19.15.16.8 NMAC requires can be stenciled into the steel or welded onto the steel plate's surface. The division may require a re-survey of the well location.

**D.** As soon as practical, but no later than one year after the completion of plugging operations, the operator shall:

- (1) level the location;
- (2) remove deadmen and other junk; and
- (3) take other measures necessary or required by the division to restore the location to a safe

and clean condition.

**E.** The operator shall close all pits and below-grade tanks pursuant to 19.15.17 NMAC.

**F.** Upon completion of plugging and clean up restoration operations as required, the operator shall contact the appropriate division district office to arrange for an inspection of the well and location.

[19.15.25.10 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.202 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.11 REPORTS FOR PLUGGING AND ABANDONMENT:**

**A.** The operator shall file form C-105 as provided in 19.15.7.16 NMAC.

**B.** Within 30 days after completing required restoration work, the operator shall file with the division a record of the work done on form C-103 as provided in 19.15.7.14 NMAC.

**C.** The division shall not approve the record of plugging or release a bond until the operator has filed necessary reports and the division has inspected and approved the location.

[19.15.25.11 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.202 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

**19.15.25.12 APPROVED TEMPORARY ABANDONMENT:** The division may place a well in approved temporary abandonment for a period of up to five years. Prior to the expiration of an approved temporary abandonment the operator shall return the well to beneficial use under a plan the division approves, permanently plug and abandon the well and restore and remediate the location or apply for a new approval to temporarily abandon the well. An operator is limited to placing the following numbers of wells in approved temporary abandonment:

**A.** one well, if the operator operates between one and five wells; or

**B.** one-third of all wells (rounded to the nearest whole number), if the operator operates more than five wells.

[19.15.25.12 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.203 NMAC, 12/1/2008; A, 1/15/2019]

**19.15.25.13 REQUEST FOR APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR APPROVED TEMPORARY ABANDONMENT:**

**A.** An operator seeking approval for approved temporary abandonment shall submit on form C-103 a notice of intent to seek approved temporary abandonment for the well describing the proposed temporary abandonment procedure the operator will use. The operator shall not commence work until the division has approved the request. The operator shall give 24 hours' notice to the appropriate division district office before beginning work.

**B.** The division shall not approve a permit for approved temporary abandonment until the operator furnishes evidence demonstrating that the well's casing and cementing are mechanically and physically sound and in such condition as to prevent:

- (1) damage to the producing zone;
- (2) migration of hydrocarbons or water;
- (3) the contamination of fresh water or other natural resources; and

(4) the leakage of a substance at the surface.

C. The operator shall demonstrate both internal and external mechanical integrity pursuant to Subsection A of 19.15.25.14 NMAC.

D. Upon successful completion of the work on the temporarily abandoned well, the operator shall submit a request for approved temporary abandonment to the appropriate division district office on form C-103 together with other information Subsection E of 19.15.7.14 NMAC requires.

E. The division shall not approve a permit for approved temporary abandonment until the operator provides financial assurance for the well that complies with Subsection D of 19.15.8.9 NMAC.

F. The division shall specify the permit's expiration date, which shall be not more than five years from the date of approval.

[19.15.25.13 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.203 NMAC, 12/1/2008; A, 1/15/2019]

#### **19.15.25.14 DEMONSTRATING MECHANICAL INTEGRITY:**

A. An operator may use the following methods of demonstrating internal casing integrity for wells to be placed in approved temporary abandonment:

(1) the operator may set a cast iron bridge plug within 100 feet of uppermost perforations or production casing shoe, load the casing with inert fluid and pressure test to 500 psi surface pressure with a pressure drop of not more than 10 percent over a 30 minute period;

(2) the operator may run a retrievable bridge plug or packer to within 100 feet of uppermost perforations or production casing shoe, and test the well to 500 psi surface pressure for 30 minutes with a pressure drop of not greater than 10 percent over a 30 minute period; or

(3) the operator may demonstrate that the well has been completed for less than five years and has not been connected to a pipeline.

B. During the testing described in Paragraphs (1) and (2) of Subsection A of 19.15.25.14 NMAC the operator shall:

(1) open all casing valves during the internal pressure tests and report a flow or pressure change occurring immediately before, during or immediately after the 30 minute pressure test;

(2) top off the casing with inert fluid prior to leaving the location;

(3) report flow during the test in Paragraph (2) of Subsection A of 19.15.25.14 NMAC to the appropriate division district office prior to completion of the temporary abandonment operations; the division may require remediation of the flow prior to approving the well's temporary abandonment.

C. An operator may use any method approved by the EPA in 40 C.F.R. section 146.8(c) to demonstrate external casing and cement integrity for wells to be placed in approved temporary abandonment.

D. The division shall not accept mechanical integrity tests or logs conducted more than 12 months prior to submittal.

E. The operator shall record mechanical integrity tests on a chart recorder with a maximum two hour clock and maximum 1000 pound spring, which has been calibrated within the six months prior to conducting the test. Witnesses to the test shall sign the chart. The operator shall submit the chart with form C-103 requesting approved temporary abandonment.

F. The division may approve other testing methods the operator proposes if the operator demonstrates that the test satisfies the requirements of Subsection B of 19.15.25.13 NMAC.

[19.15.25.14 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.203 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

#### **19.15.25.15 WELLS TO BE USED FOR FRESH WATER:**

A. When a well to be plugged may safely be used as a fresh water well and the landowner agrees to take over the well for that purpose, the operator does not need to plug the well above the sealing plug set below the fresh water formation.

B. The operator shall comply with other requirements contained in 19.15.25.9 NMAC through 19.15.25.11 NMAC regarding plugging, including surface restoration and reporting requirements.

C. Upon completion of plugging operations, the operator shall file with the division a written agreement signed by the landowner whereby the landowner agrees to assume responsibility for the well. Upon the filing of this agreement and division approval of well abandonment operations, the operator is no longer responsible for the well, and the division may release bonds on the well.

[19.15.25.15 NMAC - Rp, 19.15.4.204 NMAC, 12/1/2008]

#### **HISTORY of 19.15.25 NMAC:**

**History of Repealed Material:** 19.15.4 NMAC, Plugging and Abandonment of Wells (filed 11/29/2001) repealed 12/1/2008.

**NMAC History:**

19.15.4 NMAC, Plugging and Abandonment of Wells (filed 11/29/2001) was replaced by 19.15.25 NMAC, Plugging and Abandonment of Wells, effective 12/1/2008.