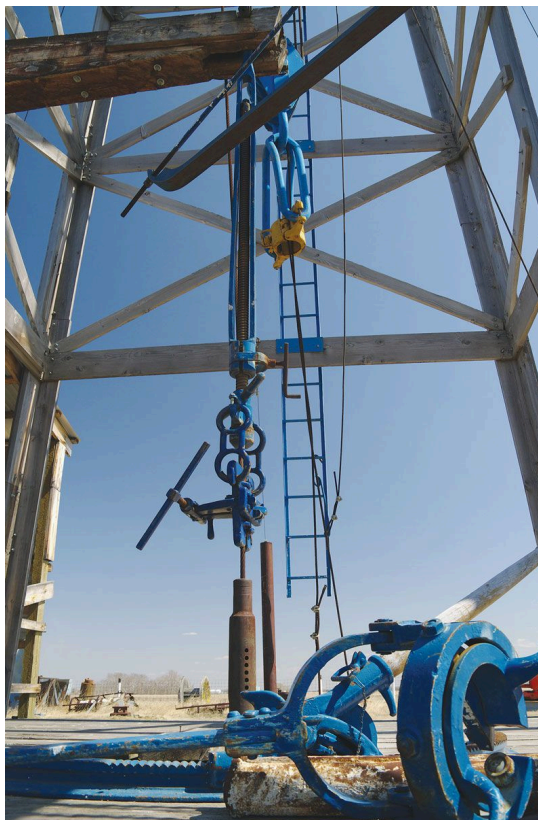


Federal legislation introduced to decommission offshore, gas wells, pipelines and platforms

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U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have introduced legislation that would address the growing threat of abandoned offshore oil and gas infrastructure to marine ecosystems and the environment.

According to a study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, more than 2,700 wells and 500 platforms in the Gulf of Mexico are overdue for decommissioning. The same study found that the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which are responsible for enforcing decommissioning deadlines, can't effectively enforce decommissioning obligations and financial assurance requirements.

Among the recommended steps Congress can take, according to the study to address the current backlog of overdue decommissioning requirements, is instituting new reporting requirements from the Interior Department to Congress on the status of decommissioning.

“Neglected oil wells off our coasts are a ticking time bomb that threaten our coastal communities and environment in Oregon and nationwide,” Wyden said. “It’s unacceptable that Big Oil has dodged responsibility to clean up drilling sites and pollution. This legislation will provide the data needed to hold Big Oil accountable and protect the public as well as our waterways and marine life.”

“Orphaned wells are an environmental catastrophe waiting to explode,” Merkley said. “They pose the possibility of massive damage to the ocean by leaking oil and gas and must be addressed quickly.”

The Plug Offshore Wells Act would direct the U.S. Department of the Interior to submit an annual public report to Congress on the status of decommissioning offshore oil and gas wells, platforms, and pipelines. It would also reduce financial burdens on taxpayers by increasing oversight of Big Oil companies and hold them accountable for the full terms of their offshore oil leases.

The Plug Offshore Wells Act is supported by the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, Natural Resources Defense Council, Oceana, Ocean Conservancy, Ocean Defense Initiative, and the Surfrider Foundation.

In addition to Wyden and Merkley, the bill is co-sponsored in the by Senators Peter Welch (D-Vt.), and Ed Markey (D-Mass).