



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

News Release

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33 MORE UNDERGROUND INJECTION WELLS CLOSE AS CALIFORNIA MOVES TO PROTECT GROUNDWATER

Note: The associated documents, including a list of wells and operators, can be found [here](#)

SACRAMENTO – Continuing the commitment to strengthen California’s oversight of oil and gas production, thirty-three underground injection wells permanently ceased operation Thursday under new regulations designed to bring the state into full compliance with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The wells were drilled into geologic formations that have not been exempted for that activity by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, that do not naturally contain oil reservoirs, and that have natural water quality of less than 3,000 milligrams per liter/total dissolved solids (TDS).

“This is part of our ongoing effort to ensure that California’s groundwater resources are protected as oil and gas production take place,” State Oil & Gas Supervisor Steven Bohlen said. “The regulations are working. We’re on track to do what we set out to do in establishing an aggressive compliance schedule with the U.S. EPA and State Water Resources Control Board.”

Earlier this month, the Department of Conservation (DOC) released a four-year Renewal Plan for its Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources with goals that include review of every oil and gas production project it has approved, including a check to ensure appropriate protection of groundwater sources. The shutdown of an additional 33 injection wells advances DOGGR’s progress under the Renewal Plan to correct past problems and to create a regulatory program that ensures protection of public health and the environment.

Of the 33 wells impacted, 21 were actively injecting. Thirty one of the wells are scattered across several oil fields in Kern County. One is in the Sespe field in Ventura County and one is in the Newhall field in northern Los Angeles County. Division staff was inspecting oil fields on Friday to ensure injection had indeed ceased.

“There should not be a significant impact to production as a result of these injection wells coming offline,” Bohlen said.

The Department of Conservation’s mission is to balance today’s needs with tomorrow’s challenges and foster intelligent, sustainable, and efficient use of California’s energy, land, and mineral resources.

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After discovering that some injection was occurring into zones that had not been approved (“exempted”) by the U.S. EPA under the terms of the Safe Drinking Water Act, DOC and the State Water Board began an evaluation of all 50,000 injection wells in the state, with an immediate emphasis on those drilled into zones with the highest water quality.

The U.S. EPA granted DOC’s oil and gas division “primacy” to regulate underground injection wells related to oil and gas operations in California in 1983. The Division issued regulations in April that included a number of deadlines to ensure Safe Drinking Water Act compliance. Under those regulations, 23 wells were previously shut in because they were injecting waste fluid in close proximity to wells producing water suitable for drinking or agricultural use.

State regulators are considering data submitted by oil and gas producers that may lead to applications for further exemptions from the U.S. EPA. Unless exemptions are granted, injection into 11 geologic zones historically treated as exempt from the Safe Drinking Water Act must cease by December 31, 2016. Injection into all other non-exempt zones with water quality of less than 10,000 TDS must cease by February 15, 2017.

The Safe Drinking Water Act does not apply to water with TDS greater than 10,000 TDS. Even if a geologic zone has very low TDS (the state and federal standard for drinking water is 500 TDS), an exemption may be granted if the water naturally contains oil or high levels of minerals such as arsenic or boron, making the water unfit for either drinking or agricultural use.

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