



California
**Department of
Conservation**
Geologic Energy Management

CEQA Guidance for Operators Project Description

Revised: January 05, 2023

Disclaimer: This guidance document is for information purposes only. This document has neither the force of law nor regulation and should not be cited as a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirement. Refer to applicable laws and regulations on current legal requirements.

Introduction

A project¹ description is required for every Notice of Intention (NOI) or similar application² that an operator submits to the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) for approval to conduct oil, gas, or geothermal activities.³ The project description is the starting point for CalGEM to conduct review in accordance with CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.).

A project description summarizes the proposed project, the physical activity involved with the project, where such activity would occur, and the potential environmental effects of the project. A project description assists CalGEM staff in determining whether CalGEM is a Responsible Agency or the Lead Agency under CEQA and the level of environmental analysis that CEQA requires. A project description also aids CalGEM in identifying whether it needs additional information from the operator to conduct the environmental review in compliance with CEQA.

A project description should be project-specific, written in a clear narrative format, and use simple language where practical. An operator may develop and use a template for project descriptions if the template contains the elements described below. A project description may cover a single or multiple NOIs. If one project description is intended to cover multiple NOIs, include a list of all wells associated with the proposed project description. Operators are encouraged to group multiple wells with similar locations in singular project descriptions.

¹ A "project" is the "whole" action that could result in a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. Permits and other approvals for land uses issued by a public agency can be projects (Pub. Resources Code, 21065; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15378).

² NOI (oil & gas and geothermal), PRC §§ 3203, 3724, CCR tit. 14, §§ 1714, 1914, 1931; UIC, CCR tit. 14, §1724.6; UGS, PRC § 3180, CCR tit. 14, § 1726.2; Well Stim, PRC § 3160 CCR tit. 14, § 1783.

³ Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, §1682, 1682.1, 1683.1, 1720.1, 1751, 1783, 1783.1, and 1784.

An operator should upload or enter the project description for oil and gas projects in the text box in WellSTAR.⁴ For geothermal projects, an operator should submit the project description along with the rest of the geothermal application package to the CalGEM District in which the project is located. Please note that not providing the information identified in this document or requested by CalGEM during the environmental review can significantly delay the CEQA review and required compliance process.

Data Collection and Upload

To facilitate the application review process, operators should consult with the local permitting authorities for any permits and CEQA reviews required for the proposed project before applying to CalGEM for permit or project approval.⁵

List the title, date, and State Clearinghouse number of the environmental document that covers the proposed project, list the specific section and page numbers. The environmental document should have a CEQA notice such as a Notice of Determination (if an EIR) or a Notice of Intent to Adopt (if an ND/MND).

What Information Should be Included in the Project Description?

The CCR tit. 14, § 15124 of the CEQA Guidelines defines the types of information that should be included in a project description:

The description of the project shall contain the following information but should not supply extensive detail beyond that needed for evaluation and review of the environmental impact.

- a) The precise location and boundaries of the proposed project shall be shown on a detailed map, preferably topographic. The location of the project shall also appear on a regional map.
- b) A statement of objectives sought by the proposed project. A clearly written statement of objectives will help the lead agency develop a reasonable range of alternatives to evaluate in the EIR and will aid the decision makers in preparing findings or a statement of overriding considerations, if necessary. The statement of objectives should include the underlying purpose of the project.
- c) A general description of the project's technical, economic, and environmental characteristics, considering the principal engineering proposals if any and supporting public service facilities.
- d) A statement briefly describing the intended uses of the EIR.
 1. This statement shall include, to the extent that the information is known to the Lead Agency,

⁴ See the [WellSTAR CEQA User Guide](#) on the CalGEM CEQA webpage for information on how to fill out the CEQA Information step in WellSTAR.

⁵ [NTO-2019-16-Compliance](#)

- A. A list of the agencies that are expected to use the EIR in their decision making, and
 - B. A list of permits and other approvals required to implement the project.
 - C. A list of related environmental review and consultation requirements required by federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or policies. To the fullest extent possible, the lead agency should integrate CEQA review with these related environmental review and consultation requirements.
2. If a public agency must make more than one decision on a project, all its decisions subject to CEQA should be listed, preferably in the order in which they will occur. On request, the Office of Planning and Research will provide assistance in identifying state permits for a project.

Project Name

Enter the project name as submitted to CalGEM. If there is an assigned CalGEM project number provided by CEQA Program staff, please include it here.

Operator Name

Identify the operator responsible for the proposed project.

Proposed Project

The information describing the proposed project shall address the following elements but should not supply more detail than needed to evaluate and review the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. CCR tit. 14, § 15124.

Provide a statement of the proposed project objectives, purpose, and benefits. Examples of a proposed project purpose are enhancing or complying with safety measures, abandoning idle wells, or developing additional wells now and in the future. Describe, with quantifiable metrics, whether the proposed project would increase production and expand associated facilities (e.g., increase processing capacity, addition or expansion of flowlines, the addition of flares, or steam generation capacity).

Describe any change in the proposed project scope. Include information regarding any modification, expansion, or supplement to an existing permit (e.g., new wells drilled in an existing oil field, rework, abandonment of an existing well, or modification or expansion of a previously permitted project). If the proposed project is a modification or expansion from an earlier permit, briefly describe the original permit, the proposed changes, and the purpose of the proposed changes.

Describe the surface and subsurface activities. Use plain language (e.g., depth, geologic formations, or the vibration radius resulting from the proposed project) to describe the surface and subsurface activities associated with the proposed project.

Describe each phase of the proposed project. Include information to the extent feasible where details of each phase are not currently known or flushed out. Each phase includes timing, duration, equipment needed (e.g., construction, testing, completion, or operation), and associated construction activities (e.g., well pad, flow lines, new or widening access roads, or power poles).

Disclose, describe, and quantify existing and proposed development, exploration, construction activities. Include the level of disturbance as a direct and indirect result of proposed project activity (temporary and permanent). Provide acreage for temporary and permanent disturbance. Identify if the proposed project has an existing well pad(s), other facilities, or pipelines or if the ground surface is graded or developed. Describe the proposed water use, including quantity, source, source owner and water right, compliance with Groundwater Sustainability Plan(s), travel plan, and transportation method. Include transportation required for chemicals, equipment, and waste, and describe the disposition of all waste materials and the facility where the operator will manage them.

Underground Injection Control (UIC) - For UIC project applications, identify if the project application is for a new project, modification, or merger of multiple UIC projects. Give detailed information on previously approved Project Approval Letters (PALs) and the relationship to the proposed project.

For individual NOIs, identify if an NOI is part of an approved UIC project, a new project, or a modification and give the PAL number and when CalGEM approved the PAL. Upload a copy of the approved PAL in WellSTAR. Give detailed information on previously approved PALs and their relationship to the proposed project. NOIs that do not have an approved PAL may be placed on hold by CalGEM or returned to the operator by CalGEM.

Geothermal - For geothermal projects identify if the application is for exploratory wells (resource development) or field development of a geothermal power plant. Include discussion of new wells, reworks, and abandonment of wells for an existing power plant.

For geothermal NOIs not associated with geothermal power plants, explain the purpose of the well and if it is for commercial or personal use, and give detailed information on the proposed project.

Identify Best Management Practices (BMPs). This includes all BMPs intended to avoid or reduce any potential impact(s) on the environment that may result from the proposed project. Correlate all BMPs to each proposed activity.

Project Location

The operator should identify the city(-ies) and county(-ies) where a proposed project is located; whether all or part of the proposed project lies within incorporated city limits; whether the proposed project is within or extends beyond a designated oil field boundary.

Include all critical well locational details, such as the presence, distance, and location of nearby areas where the public may occur (e.g., dwellings, parks, schools, and businesses). CCR tit. 14, § 1720.

Environmental Setting

Describe the current environmental conditions in the proposed project area and the land use for the proposed project location and surrounding land use(s) (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, established oil field, hazardous waste facility, or other industrial processing or disposal).

When describing the proposed project site, expressly identify any known sensitive receptors (e.g., schools, parks and playgrounds, daycare centers, residences, hospitals, and nursing homes). If the operator identifies vegetation, indicate the acreage of vegetation to be cleared both temporarily and permanently. Include timelines that qualify as temporary and permanent and identify the permit and agency that approved the vegetation clearing if vegetation is already removed.

Disclose and describe all environmental, scenic, historical, and cultural resources that may be impacted by the proposed project activities (e.g., ecological resources such as threatened or endangered species and their habitat, species of concern and their habitat, and other public trust resources). Select a distance that captures the possible project impacts.

Where supplemental information on the environmental setting or incidental take permits exists (e.g., a biological assessment, consultation with fish and wildlife agencies), the operator is to provide it by uploading that information into WellSTAR or, in the case of a geothermal project, submit it with the initial application.

Images and Maps

When submitting images and maps clearly display the proposed project vicinity, features, and boundary; include all activities related to the proposed project. Information can be shown with aerial photos, images.

Outlining the proposed project in a bold border can help delineate the proposed project area. The maps or images should show the Public Land Survey System or latitude and longitude, a legend for features, a north arrow, a scale, and the date the operator created the map or captured the photo or image.

Notes

Provide citations and references for all statements and data in the proposed project description, supported by complete copies of the referenced materials as attachments.

Operators may find additional information on CEQA compliance at:
<https://www.conservation.ca.gov/calgem/CEQA> or by contacting the CEQA Program at CEQA@conservation.ca.gov.