



Plug Offshore Wells Act

Introduced in the Senate by: Senators Peter Welch (D-Vt.); Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.); Ron Wyden (D-Ore.); Ed Markey (D-Mass.)

Introduced in the House by: Representative Katie Porter (D-CA-47)

Background:

Abandoned offshore oil and gas infrastructure poses a growing risk to marine ecosystems and the environment as extreme weather events [intensify](#). According to a recent [study](#) by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), over 2,700 wells and 500 platforms in the Gulf of Mexico are overdue for decommissioning. In the same study, [GAO found](#) that the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which are responsible for enforcing decommissioning deadlines, are unable to effectively enforce decommissioning obligations and financial assurance requirements. GAO has recommended steps Congress can take to address the current backlog of overdue decommissioning requirements, including instituting new reporting requirements from DOI to Congress on the status of decommissioning.

Current delays and defaults in decommissioning offshore oil and gas infrastructure also pose significant financial risks. When oil companies fail to meet their commitments, American taxpayers bear the financial burden of decommissioning abandoned platforms and wells, which is a lengthy and expensive process. As of June 2023, BOEM holds only \$3.5 million in supplemental bonds to cover \$40-\$70 billion in estimated decommissioning costs, creating a large gap of potential taxpayer funding needed to cover any defaults on decommissioning commitments. As the U.S. moves towards clean energy and as more offshore infrastructure goes offline, this figure may increase.

Legislation:

The *Plug Offshore Wells Act* will require the DOI to submit an annual report on the status of decommissioning offshore oil and gas wells, platforms, and pipelines. The report must be publicly available, and include:

- The number of applications for decommissioning;
- The number of offshore wells, platforms, and pipelines that did not decommission by the date required;
- The number of offshore oil and gas wells and platforms approved for decommissioning;
- The length of any oil and gas pipelines that were decommissioned in place or removed;
- The status of enforcement actions by BSEE with respect to decommissioning offshore oil and gas infrastructure.

Supporting Organizations:

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