

Ministry of Natural Resources

Old Oil and Gas Wells in Ontario

Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Lunch and Learn

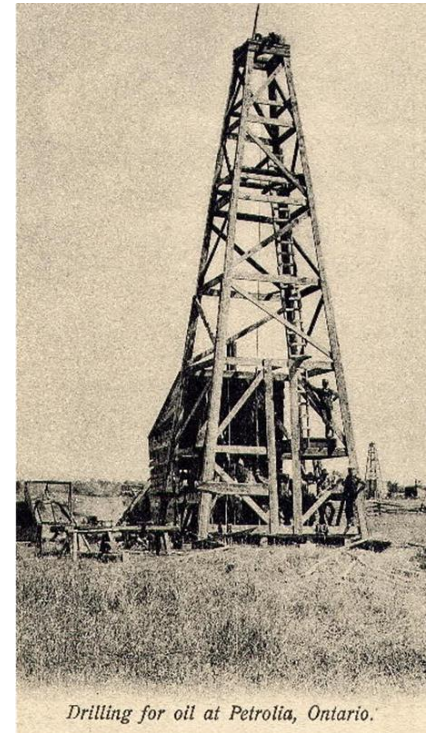
June 26, 2025

Outline

- The petroleum industry in Ontario
- The ministry's role in oil and gas
- Identifying a well
- Public and environmental safety
- Responsibilities of landowners and provincial supports
- Abandoned Works Program
- Ministry's Legacy Oil and Gas Wells Action Plan
- Q&A session

The petroleum industry in Ontario

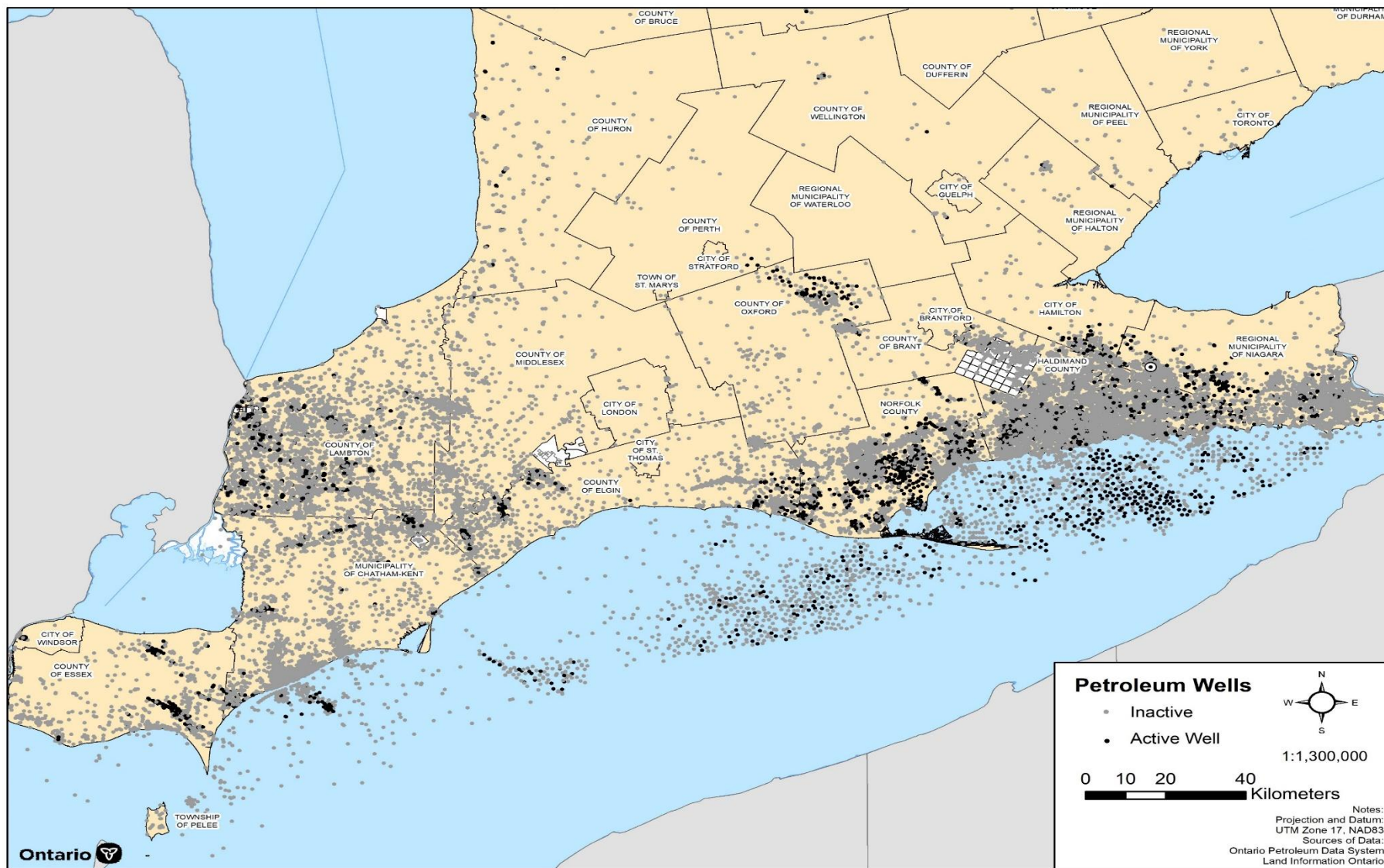
- Ontario has one of the oldest petroleum industries in the world. Oil was discovered in Lambton County in 1858.
- Production of gas and oil continued south and along Lake Erie east to the Niagara Peninsula.
- The ministry has records for over 27,000 wells, however there may be many more on the landscape without records.
- More than 3,400 active gas and oil wells in Ontario.
 - Active wells are currently in operation and produce oil, gas or salt.
 - The rest are inactive, old wells, or 'legacy wells'.



POLL #1

How aware are you of the presence
of old gas and oil wells in your
community?

Southwestern Ontario petroleum wells



The Ministry's role in oil and gas



Technical Expertise: providing expert advice, developing technical standards, policy and regulation



Approvals and Inspection/Compliance: Issuing and ensuring compliance with approvals, standards and regulations under the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act (OGSRA)



Abandoned Works Program: Funding program for landowners to plug oil and gas wells that pose a threat to public and environmental safety



Emergency Management/Response:

- Emergency Management Ontario supports municipal response and coordinates provincial activities
- MNR leads responses on Crown Land and provides technical expertise to government and municipalities

Identifying a well

1.

Search for a well record

- Search the Petroleum Well Map database
- Visit the online Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Library
- link to the database & library at **Ontario.ca/gasandoilwells**.

2.

Physical search of your property.

- Debris piles, old foundations, old tanks, or well casings.
- Covers that may conceal a well.
- Areas of dead or discoloured vegetation.

3.

Talk to neighbours and long-established members in your community.

4.

Access aerial photos from your municipal office or local library.

Unsure if a well on your property is an old gas or oil well or a water well?
Contact the **Petroleum Operations Section, MNR**, at
gasandoilwells@ontario.ca or **519-873-4634**.

Public and environmental safety

Old gas and oil wells may pose a public safety and environmental risk if the wells were not properly plugged and decommissioned or left unplugged.

Aging wells can potentially cause spills to the environment and provide a pathway for poisonous or explosive gases to reach the surface.

Signs of a leaking well include:

- black soil staining, damage to or discolouration of vegetation;
- the ground is depressed or sinking;
- the presence of gas bubbles in pooling water; or,
- a rotten egg smell caused by hydrogen sulphide.



Be well-aware

If you identify a leaking well, contact the Spills Action Centre at 1-866-MOE-TIPS (663-8477). If you aren't sure, contact us at **Gasandoilwells@ontario.ca** or call **519-873-4634**.

If you suspect released gases, such as hydrogen sulphide, get to higher ground and open spaces to avoid accumulated toxic gases.

If there is an immediate concern for public health and safety, you and all other individuals on your property should evacuate the area and contact 911.

Before making changes or building a new structure on your property, search for a well record on the **Petroleum Well Map** found at [Ontario.ca/gasandoilwells](https://ontario.ca/gasandoilwells).

Areas with old and inactive wells should be avoided when contemplating construction, because access to the well may be required in the future and should not be constrained.

When excavating or beginning construction, watch for signs of a well. If you see signs of a gas or oil well, stop working and contact the ministry for your safety.



Responsibilities and provincial support

The majority of old wells are located on private land and do not have a license holder, lessee or other viable operator, which means responsibility for the well falls to the landowner.

Landowners are responsible for maintenance and plugging a well if an active operator cannot be identified.

Plugged wells can also deteriorate over time.

The **Abandoned Works Program** is available to landowners to cover the costs associated with gas and oil well plugging if a well is hazardous to the public or the environment and the eligibility requirements are met.

POLL #2

Are you aware the province could provide financial assistance to plug wells that pose a heightened risk to public and environmental safety?

Abandoned Works Program



Any oil or gas well may qualify for the Abandoned Works Program if both of the following apply:

- an active operator cannot be identified for the well, other than the landowner
- you have not used, benefited from, or intentionally tampered with the well



If you want to have a well on your property considered for the program, email gasandoilwells@ontario.ca with the following:

1. your contact information
2. the well location and licence number (if known)
3. a description of the wellhead or casing visible, any leaking fluids or gases. Photos are helpful!



The ministry will determine if your well qualifies for the program. If your well qualifies, we will:

- have an inspector visit the site to do an assessment of the well and rank your well based on the risk to public safety and the environment. Wells that we rank as immediate or significant hazards are addressed first.
- **arrange and pay for a pre-qualified well contractor to plug the well**, on behalf of the landowner, at the earliest opportunity.



Access to the land where the well is situated will need to be granted by the existing landowner. In some cases, this may require consent from adjoining property owners.



More information about the Abandoned Works Program can be found at **Ontario.ca/gasandoilwells**.

Legacy Oil and Gas Wells Action Plan Strategy



Understand Risks

- Expand knowledge to focus on areas of highest risk
- Evaluate strategies to mitigate risk
- Invest in science to inform solutions



Reduce Risks

- Address risks in collaboration with ministry partners
- Develop products and tools for municipalities and the public



Enhance Preparedness

- Improve emergency preparedness by enabling municipalities and partners to develop plans for prevention and response

Engagement, Consultation and Partnerships

Reviewing the feedback from consultation discussions will play a key part in:

- Enhanced management of legacy oil and gas wells and subsurface gas hazards through the development and implementation of a comprehensive, multi-year Action Plan
- Identifying opportunities for province to assist municipalities and landowners manage legacy oil and gas wells and subsurface gas migration hazards
- Defining areas of highest risk to public and environmental safety
- Enhancing working relationships across ministry and municipal partners
- Improving emergency preparedness and response
- Promoting awareness of risks and access to tools and supports

A large, abstract teal shape occupies the right side of the slide, extending from the top right corner towards the bottom left, partially framing the text.

Questions and comments