

After 19 Days, West Texas Oil Well Finally Plugged; Experts Slam Oversight and Contractor Liability

NY, NY, UNITED STATES, October 11, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A Kinder Morgan-operated oil well in West Texas has been sealed after 19 days of uncontrolled emissions, an episode that reignited criticism over the environmental risks posed by so-called "orphan wells" — abandoned sites without a responsible operator.

The leak occurred about five miles west of Toyah in Reeves County, where workers reported visible discharges of water mixed with chemicals, gas, and hydrogen sulfide vapors. Kinder

Morgan said in a statement that "no active gas emissions are currently detected" following the initial blast and subsequent releases, adding that it plans to permanently plug the well and is investigating the cause.



"This case reflects a pattern we've seen before in Latin America with Vaca Muerta: the absence of proper protocols and clear accountability multiplies both environmental and financial risks," said María Gabriela Zambrano, a gas engineer and industrial safety specialist who led the technical investigation after a 2019 incident in Neuquén, Argentina.

Zambrano argued the failure was institutional as much as technical. "The key error wasn't the explosion — it was delegating maintenance to contractors without fully transferring knowledge of the well's design. That opens the door to critical failures. Regulators should have enforced stricter oversight," she said.

Texas regulators have also raised alarms over the rising number of such incidents. The Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) has requested \$100 million in emergency funding to address uncontrolled wells. Texas currently has more than 9,000 documented orphan wells, with experts warning that many more remain uncouncted. In its fiscal 2024 report, the RRC said it sealed 1,012

orphan wells, surpassing its regulatory goal.

Critics say deficiencies lie in the plugging process itself. Reuters has documented cases of wells “reviving” after being officially sealed. “This is the handiwork of the Railroad Commission’s so-called ‘three amigos’ — cement poured incorrectly on jobs they approved,” said industry analyst Hawk Dunlap.

Local communities reported persistent “rotten egg” odors from hydrogen sulfide and voiced fears over groundwater contamination. Evacuations were ordered in parts of Toyah.

Even with the well now shut in, Zambrano warned of lasting impacts. “The real danger is invisible contamination — methane emissions, toxic compounds leaching into the aquifer. What matters most isn’t the plugging but the cleanup and accountability for those who neglected their responsibilities,” she said.

To prevent similar incidents, she called for:

Maintenance overseen by technicians with full knowledge of original well design.

Independent audits and integrity testing before and after critical operations.

Stronger regulatory powers for the RRC to halt non-compliant work.

Mandatory financial guarantees from operators to fund environmental restoration.

While emissions have ceased, the episode leaves lingering questions over why the well was allowed to operate uncontrolled for weeks — and who will bear responsibility. Communities and experts are watching closely, hoping the fallout forces tighter regulation and averts future ecological crises.

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