



Department  
of Energy &  
Climate Change

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[www.decc.gov.uk](http://www.decc.gov.uk)

Our ref: 13/1664

19 December 2013

By e-mail to:

Dear

I refer to your e-mailed letter of 21 November which asked the following:

“Under the Freedom of Information Act, please provide answers (and supporting documents if applicable) to the following:

1 In relation to offshore gas / oil wells which fall under UK Government jurisdiction:

- a. How many wells are currently in operation (wells not rigs)?
- b. How many abandoned wells are there?
- c. How many operating wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?
- d. How many abandoned wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?
- e. How many leaks from operating wells have been reported within the last 5 years?
- f. How many leaks from abandoned wells have been reported within the last 5 years?
- g. Does the UK Government keep records of abandoned wells with leaks / cementation integrity issues?

2 In relation to onshore gas / oil wells in the UK:

- a. How many wells are currently in operation?
- b. How many abandoned wells are there?
- c. How many operating wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?
- d. Where are these wells?
- e. How many abandoned wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?
- f. Where are these wells?
- g. How many leaks from operating wells have been reported within the last 5 years?
- h. How many leaks from abandoned wells have been reported within the last 5 years?
- i. Does the UK Government keep records of abandoned wells with leaks / cementation integrity issues?

3. During gas / oil exploration for conventional targets, are wells hydraulically fractured?

4. During gas / oil exploration for unconventional targets (e.g. shale, coal bed methane), are wells hydraulically fractured using exactly the same technique for conventional targets?

5. During gas / oil exploration for unconventional targets (e.g. shale, coal bed methane), does high pressure, high volume slick water hydraulic fracturing (often referred to as fracking) take place?

6. If yes, please provide evidence to state at what point of the process this occurs (e.g. initial drilling, pressure testing, sampling etc).”

I can confirm that the Department holds some of the information requested and where this is the case we have included responses in bullet point form to those questions below. Your request has been considered under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. However, some of the information which you have requested may constitute environmental information for the purposes of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). As such, to the extent that the information requested is environmental your request has also been considered under the EIRs.

**In relation to offshore gas / oil wells which fall under UK Government jurisdiction:**

**a. How many wells are currently in operation (wells not rigs)?**

- There are about 25 offshore wells currently drilling
- Some 3360 offshore wells have been completed for production (ie are either producing oil and /or gas or are shut-in)

**b. How many abandoned wells are there?**

- Approximately 6500

**c. How many operating wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- DECC does not hold this data

**d. How many abandoned wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- DECC does not hold this data

**e. How many leaks from operating wells have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- Any release of oil and/or chemicals from offshore installations, including wells and pipelines, must be reported to DECC Offshore Oil and Gas Environment and Decommissioning (OGED) using a Petroleum Operations Notice No.1 (PON1). Details of PON1s received by the Department are published on our website at the following link <https://www.gov.uk/oil-and-gas-environmental-data#pon-1-data>. As far as DECC OGED is aware, no leaks have been reported for operating wells during the last five years, but a leak was reported from a suspended well in the Elgin field that attracted media attention (further details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/elgin-gas-release-government-interest-group>) and a recent review of all suspended wells on the UKCS confirmed that there were minor gas leaks from four shut-in production wells.

**f. How many leaks from abandoned wells have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- As far as DECC OGED is aware, there have been no reports of leaks from abandoned wells in the last 5 years.

**g. Does the UK Government keep records of abandoned wells with leaks / cementation integrity issues?**

- Information in relation to leaks from abandoned wells is held by DECC.

**In relation to onshore gas / oil wells in the UK:**

**a. How many wells are currently in operation?**

- DECC requires monthly production reporting on a field basis, not a well basis. Reporting individual well operations is not required on licences issued before 1965, but we estimate there are currently about 300 onshore wells in production.

**b. How many abandoned wells are there?**

- Records for wells drilled before the 1960's are not reliable so we can only estimate that there are about 1500 abandoned wells.

**c. How many operating wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- None

**d. Where are these wells?**

- Not Applicable

**e. How many abandoned wells with cementation integrity issues have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- One

**f. Where are these wells?**

- This was a well in Staffordshire and the integrity issues have subsequently been dealt with.

**g. How many leaks from operating wells have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- None

**h. How many leaks from abandoned wells have been reported within the last 5 years?**

- None

**i. Does the UK Government keep records of abandoned wells with leaks / cementation integrity issues?**

- DECC does not keep such records – but regularly liaises with the Health & Safety Executive in relation to such issues.

**3. During gas / oil exploration for conventional targets, are wells hydraulically fractured?**

- Yes, some are.

**4. During gas / oil exploration for unconventional targets (e.g. shale, coal bed methane), are wells hydraulically fractured using exactly the same technique for conventional targets?**

- The volume of injected fluid is significantly bigger for shale gas, but similar and small volume for conventional and coalbed methane.

**5. During gas / oil exploration for unconventional targets (e.g. shale, coal bed methane), does high pressure, high volume slick water hydraulic fracturing (often referred to as fracking) take place?**

- Yes, for shales.

**6. If yes, please provide evidence to state at what point of the process this occurs (e.g. initial drilling, pressure testing, sampling etc).**

- After drilling, as part of an extended well test, see PREESE HALL information on our website, the only shale well that has been fracked so far. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/15745/5075-preese-hall-shale-gas-fracturing-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/15745/5075-preese-hall-shale-gas-fracturing-review.pdf)

Appeals procedure

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be sent to the Information Rights Unit at: Information Rights Unit (DECC Shared Service), Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 1 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0ET. E-mail: [foi@decc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:foi@decc.gsi.gov.uk) Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely