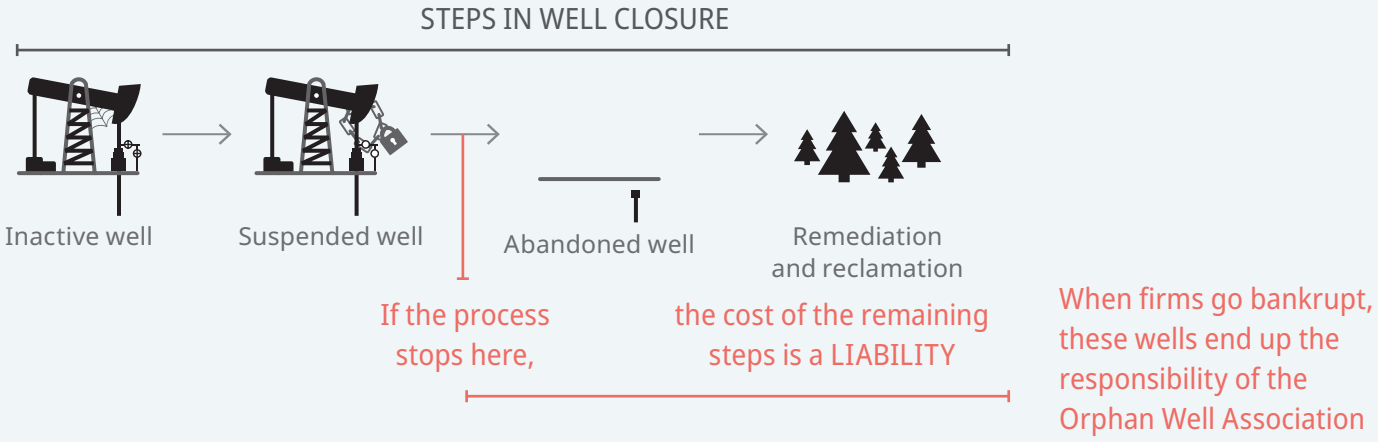
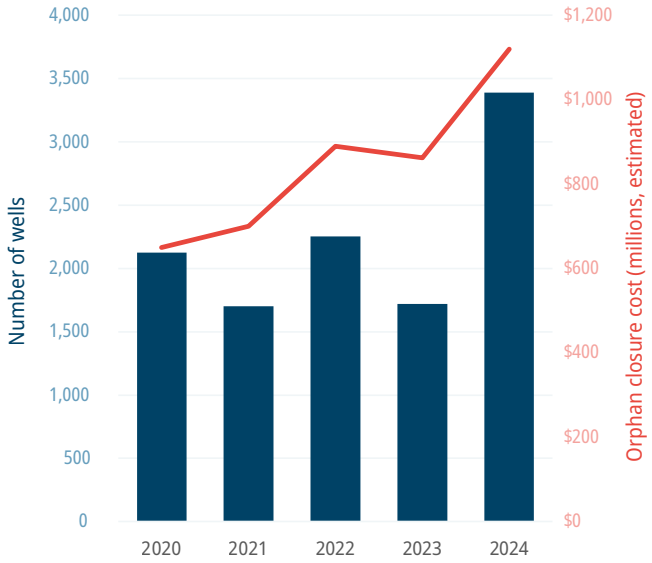
Orphaned wells: A cost for all Albertans

If you live in Alberta, you probably know that we have a problem with old oil and gas wells.

Sooner or later a well stops producing enough oil or gas to be profitable, so the energy company moves their equipment somewhere else … but the well site remains, sometimes leaking pollutants into the air and water. Sometimes the company goes bankrupt.

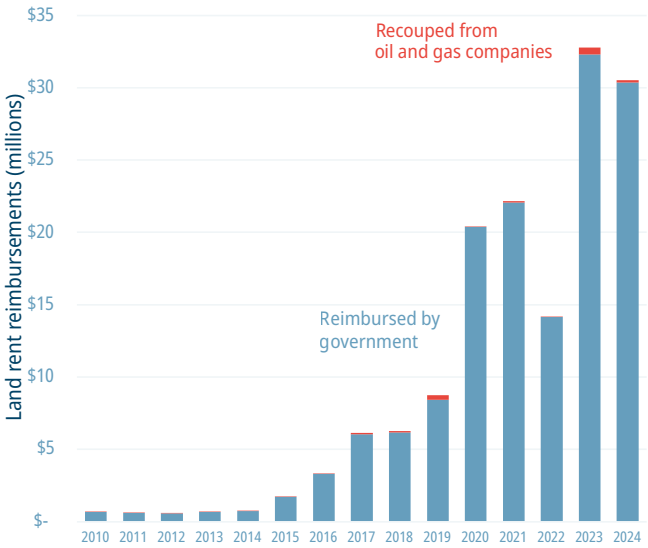
Years and even decades can pass without any action, and now there are tens of thousands of these disused old wells dotted across Alberta. This isn't just a legacy of mistakes from the past; we're continuing to make the same mistakes today.





The number of orphaned wells, and costs to clean up those wells, has continued to increase. These wells can stay on the landscape for decades, and the industry-funded cleanup fund is not nearly high enough to cover these costs.

Data source: Orphan Well Association, annual reports. www.orphanwell.ca/about-us/annual-reports



When oil and gas firms don't pay rents to landowners, the Government of Alberta is obligated to make landowners whole — allocating millions of dollars from government revenues every year.

Data source: Sharon Riley, "Alberta spent $30M on unpaid land rent for delinquent oil and gas companies in 2024," *Narwal*, July 28, 2025.