

Directive 020

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Well Abandonment

Contents

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 4 |
| 1.1 | Purpose of the Directive | 4 |
| 1.2 | AER Requirements | 4 |
| 1.3 | What's New in This Edition | 4 |
| 1.4 | Overview | 4 |
| 2 | Requirements for Nonroutine Abandonment Requests and for Notification and Reporting..... | 6 |
| 2.1 | Obtaining Approval for Nonroutine Abandonment Operations | 6 |
| 2.2 | AER Notification..... | 6 |
| 2.3 | AER Reporting Requirements | 6 |
| 3 | Previously Abandoned Wells/Zones..... | 7 |
| 3.1 | Previously Abandoned Wells (Cut and Capped) | 7 |
| 3.2 | Previous Zonal Abandonments..... | 7 |
| 3.3 | Leaking Wells/Lowering Casing Stubs | 8 |
| 3.4 | Re-entry Wells | 8 |
| 4 | Open-Hole Abandonment Requirements | 8 |
| 4.1 | Open-Hole Abandonment of Non-Oil Sands Wells..... | 9 |
| 4.2 | Open-Hole Abandonment of Wells That Have Penetrated Oil Sands Zones | 14 |
| 4.3 | Wells in the Cold Lake/Athabasca Oil Sands Area..... | 15 |
| 4.4 | Wells in the Peace River Oil Sands Area | 16 |
| 4.5 | Confirming Plug Placement | 17 |
| 4.6 | Oil Sands Evaluation Wells and Test-Hole Wells | 19 |
| 5 | Cased-Hole Abandonment Requirements..... | 19 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 5.1 | Cement Evaluation..... | 20 |
| 5.1.1 | Cement Top Determination | 20 |
| 5.1.2 | Identification of Porous Intervals | 20 |
| 5.1.3 | Remedial Cementing | 20 |
| 5.2 | Use of Inhibitor | 21 |
| 5.3 | Wells Not Penetrating Oil Sands Zones | 21 |
| 5.3.1 | Noncompleted Wells..... | 21 |
| 5.3.2 | Wells With a Cemented Liner | 21 |
| 5.3.3 | Wells With an Uncemented Liner | 22 |
| 5.3.4 | Wells With Casing Patching, Casing Failures, and Previously Cement Squeezed Intervals | 22 |
| 5.3.5 | Zonal Abandonment Within a Completed Well (Vertical/Deviated) or a Horizontal Well Completed in a Single Formation | 23 |
| 5.3.6 | Completed Horizontal Wells Across Multiple Formations | 29 |
| 5.4 | Wells Penetrating Oil Sands Zones | 29 |
| 5.4.1 | Thermal Cement..... | 29 |
| 5.4.2 | Noncompleted Wells..... | 29 |
| 5.4.3 | Wells With a Cemented Liner | 30 |
| 5.4.4 | Wells With an Uncemented Liner | 30 |
| 5.4.5 | Wells with Casing Patching, Casing Failures, and Previously Cement Squeezed Intervals | 31 |
| 5.4.6 | Zonal Abandonment Within a Completed Well (Vertical/Deviated) or a Completed Horizontal Well in a Single Formation | 32 |
| 5.4.7 | Completed Horizontal Wells Across Multiple Formations | 37 |
| 5.5 | Groundwater Protection | 38 |
| 5.5.1 | Remedial Cementing of Protected Intervals..... | 38 |
| 5.5.2 | Requesting a Groundwater Protection Waiver | 40 |
| 6 | Confirming Location of Cement Plugs | 41 |
| 6.1 | Methods for Confirming Plug Locations..... | 41 |
| 6.2 | Plug Log Submission Requirements..... | 43 |
| 7 | Testing and Inspection Requirements..... | 44 |
| 7.1 | Gas Migration Testing for Open- and Cased-Hole Wells | 44 |
| 7.1.1 | Gas Migration Test Area | 44 |
| 7.1.2 | Notification of Gas Migration | 45 |
| 7.2 | Fluid Level Test for Open-Hole Wells | 47 |
| 7.3 | Surface Casing Vent Flow Test for Cased-Hole Wells | 47 |
| 7.3.1 | Rate Determination..... | 48 |

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| 7.3.2 | Determination of Stabilized Shut-in Surface Casing Pressure | 48 |
| 7.3.3 | Determination of Serious or Non-Serious Vent Flow | 48 |
| 7.3.4 | Notification of SCVF | 48 |
| 8 | Surface Abandonment | 50 |
| 8.1 | Cutting and Capping | 50 |
| Appendix 1 | Definitions for the Purposes of <i>Directive 020</i> | 52 |

Figures

| | | |
|----|---|----|
| 1 | Oil sands area boundary | 11 |
| 2a | Plug placement examples for Southern Plains/Foothills | 12 |
| 2b | Plug placement examples for Central Plains | 12 |
| 2c | Plug placement examples for Northwest Plains | 13 |
| 2d | Plug placement example for Northeast Plains | 13 |
| 3 | Plug placement example for Cold Lake/Athabasca Oil Sands Area | 15 |
| 4 | Plug placement example for Peace River Oil Sands Area | 17 |
| 5 | Unacceptable plugs | 18 |
| 6 | Gas migration test area | 46 |
| 7 | Site inspection region | 49 |
| 8 | Examples of cased-hole abandonment for non-level-A intervals | 51 |
| 9 | Examples of cased-hole abandonment for level-A intervals | 51 |

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Directive

The Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) *Directive 020: Well Abandonment* details the minimum requirements for abandonments, casing removal, zonal abandonments, and plug backs as required under section 3.013 of the *Oil and Gas Conservation Rules*.

The objective of a well abandonment is to cover all nonsaline groundwater (water with total dissolved solids less than 4000 milligrams per litre [mg/l]) and to isolate or cover all porous zones.

All open-hole and cased-hole abandonments must be conducted in accordance with the requirements in this directive.

1.2 AER Requirements

Following AER requirements is mandatory for the responsible duty holder as specified in legislation (e.g., licensee, operator, company, applicant, approval holder, or permit holder). The term “must” indicates a requirement, while terms such as “should,” “recommends,” and “expects” indicate a recommended practice. Information on compliance and enforcement can be found on the AER website.

1.3 What’s New in This Edition

Requirements unique to this directive have been numbered. The following requirements have also been clarified:

- Section 2.2 regarding AER notification
- Sections 5.1.3 and 5.5.1.2 regarding remedial cementing of porous intervals and protected intervals
- Sections 5.3 and 5.4 regarding setting of a permanent bridge plug and permanent packer.
- Appendices 2 and 3 have been removed. Licensees can see appendices 2 and 3 of *Directive 087* for suggested procedures for testing gas migration and surface casing vent flow.

1.4 Overview

When planning to abandon a well, a licensee has to determine whether the planned abandonment operation will be routine or nonroutine, as defined by this directive. A planned abandonment operation is **routine** if it meets all the requirements that apply to the well based on

- the type of well being abandoned,
- the well’s geographic location,

- the impact of the well on any oil sands zones, and
- the absence of a wellbore problem.

Routine abandonments are any operations that comply with the requirements specified in this directive. **Routine** abandonment operations **do not** require AER approval before work is started. Nonroutine abandonments consist of any operations that vary from the requirements in this directive. **Nonroutine** abandonment operations **do** require AER approval before work is started.

Some examples of **nonroutine** abandonment operations are

- the abandonment of any well that is associated with a salt cavern;
- the abandonment of any well that is associated with an in situ coal gasification scheme;
- the planned abandonment of a well that has a wellbore problem, which includes
 - a fish-in-the-hole across two or more porous zones,
 - a leaking plug, or
 - a ghost hole across two or more porous zones;
- a reabandonment of a well;
- a planned surface abandonment of a well where cement does not cover all nonsaline groundwater zones;
- the planned use of cement plugs in a well in a manner that does not meet the requirements in this directive;
- the planned use of a bridge plug inside the surface casing;
- the planned use of any type of plugging device that will be set more than 15 metres (m) above the completion interval or in cases where there are multiple effective porous zones located between the plugging device and the completed interval; and
- the planned removal of uncemented casing from the well in a manner that does not meet the requirements stated in this directive.

Note that the above is not a comprehensive list of the types of nonroutine abandonments.

This directive may not address every abandonment situation encountered in Alberta. If the licensee has questions about an abandonment operation, contact the AER at WellOperations@aer.ca before beginning any work. If an emergency situation occurs after hours or on a weekend, contact the appropriate AER field centre.

- 1) The licensee must keep all test results and abandonment details for abandoned wells.

If a licence for an abandoned well is transferred, the new licensee assumes all responsibility for the control or further abandonment of the well and the responsibility for the costs of doing that work.

2 Requirements for Nonroutine Abandonment Requests and for Notification and Reporting

2.1 Obtaining Approval for Nonroutine Abandonment Operations

- 2) A nonroutine abandonment request must be submitted through the designated information submission system.
- 3) In addition, an email must be sent to the AER (WellOperations@aer.ca) that includes the application, all supporting documentation, and the wellbore schematic.

The AER will review the request and may ask the licensee to provide additional information regarding the nonroutine abandonment operation.

The licensee will be notified once the request has been approved or denied.

- 4) The licensee must not begin operations prior to obtaining the approval and must conduct operations in accordance with the approval.

Licensees may use the variance request forms found on our website.

2.2 AER Notification

Notification is required prior to all well abandonment operations through the designated information submission system.

- 5) Notification of abandonments (including zonal abandonment) must be submitted to the AER no earlier than seven calendar days before beginning operations.
- 6) If an operation is demobilized and remobilized later, licensees must re-notify the AER as required by 5.

Oil sands evaluation wells and test-hole wells drilled within the surface mineable area are exempt from the notification requirements.

2.3 AER Reporting Requirements

- 7) Surface abandonments must be reported through the designated information submission system within 30 days of completing the operation.

Note that a well licence abandonment submission cannot be made if there is a casing failure or a surface casing vent flow/gas migration report that is open or outstanding for the well licence.

- 8) The surface casing vent flow/gas migration reports and casing failure reports must have a resolution entered, and the reports must be closed within the designated information submission system prior to the submission of the well licence abandonment information.
- 9) Plug logs must be submitted to the AER in accordance with *Directive 080: Well Logging* within 30 days of the run date. See section 6.2 for additional details.

Industry is responsible to ensure that all work performed on a well is properly reported. (See *Directive 059: Well Drilling and Completion Data Filing Requirements*.)

3 Previously Abandoned Wells/Zones

3.1 Previously Abandoned Wells (Cut and Capped)

Wells that were abandoned to the standards in place prior to this edition of *Directive 020* are not required to be reabandoned to current standards. Exceptions to this are leaking wells and wells that are being re-entered (see below).

3.2 Previous Zonal Abandonments

Active wells that have existing zonal abandonments and were compliant at the time of the zonal abandonment will not be required to be reabandoned to current standards. The exception to this is as follows.

- 10) For wells with existing zonal abandonments of level-A intervals (see appendix 1 for definition of a level-A interval), an additional cement plug must be circulated on top of the uppermost previously abandoned zone.
 - a) This cement plug must be a minimum length of 30 vertical metres and have a minimum volume of 1 m³.
 - b) The base of this plug must be located below the base of groundwater protection (BGWP).
- 11) If the uppermost previously abandoned zone's plug is above the BGWP, the plug must be drilled out, and an additional cement plug must be circulated on top of the uppermost previously abandoned zone.
 - a) This cement plug must be a minimum length of 30 vertical metres.
 - b) All perforations above this point must be abandoned to the current standard.

3.3 Leaking Wells/Lowering Casing Stubs

- 12) The current licensee of the well must submit a nonroutine abandonment request to the AER (WellOperations@aer.ca) for approval (see section 2.1).
 - a) The request must include the reason for the re-entry.
 - b) The licensee must also notify the mineral rights owners and have an active surface lease agreement.
- 13) Approval from Alberta Energy is required if the mineral rights have reverted back to the Crown. Operations to re-enter the well for repair or lowering of the casing stub may proceed once the appropriate approvals are in place.
- 14) For wells and zones found to be leaking, the source of the leak must be identified and repaired in accordance with *Directive 087: Well Integrity Management*.
- 15) The leaking zone and all those above must be abandoned in accordance with *Directive 020*.
- 16) The well must be abandoned at surface immediately after confirmation that the repair has been successful.
- 17) The updated licence abandonment must be submitted through the designated information submission system as a reabandonment.
- 18) A licensee must follow the requirements of *Directive 056: Energy Development Applications and Schedules* when re-entering an abandoned well for the purpose of production or if it is not the current licensee of the well.

3.4 Re-entry Wells

- 19) Wells that are re-entered must be abandoned in accordance with *Directive 020* from the re-entry depth to surface.

If there are abandoned zones below the re-entry depth, the requirements set out above for previous zonal abandonments (section 3.2) and leaking wells/lowering casing stubs (section 3.3) apply.

4 Open-Hole Abandonment Requirements

- 20) For the abandonment of an open-hole well, the licensee must set cement plugs of sufficient length and number to
 - a) cover all nonsaline groundwater to the BGWP;
 - b) cover all zones above the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent; i.e., the Luscar or Blairmore Groups or Spirit River Formation); and
 - c) isolate or cover all porous zones below the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent).

To determine the BGWP depth for a well, refer to the Base of Groundwater Protection Query Tool available on the AER website under System & Tools. The elevations provided in the tool are subsea and will need to be converted to kelly bushing.

Porous zones are defined as

- carbonates with effective porosity greater than 1 per cent,
 - sandstones with effective porosity greater than 3 per cent,
 - a zone with offset production regardless of the porosity, or
 - any zone with drillstem test formation fluid recoveries greater than 300 linear metres or gas volumes greater than 300 cubic metres.
- 21) For wells in which intermediate casing has been set but has not been cemented full length, the uncemented interval must be evaluated as follows:
- a) If nonsaline groundwater has not been covered by surface casing and the intermediate casing cement top is below the BGWP, remedial cementing must be conducted to isolate nonsaline groundwater intervals.
 - b) If there are porous intervals not covered by the intermediate casing's primary cement, remedial cementing must be conducted to isolate the intervals.
 - c) Following completion of the plugging program, the wellbore must be filled with nonsaline water.

4.1 Open-Hole Abandonment of Non-Oil Sands Wells

For wells that are not in an oil sands area (figure 1), the use of fillers or additives in the cement used for plugs is acceptable for open-hole abandonments if the compressive strength of the mixture is at least 3500 kPa after curing for 48 hours.

- 22) All zones above the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent) must be covered with a plug that is placed in one or more stages.
- a) For wells where the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent) is at a depth less than 1500 m true vertical depth (TVD), this plug must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent).
 - b) For wells where the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent) is at a depth greater than 1500 m TVD, this plug must extend a minimum of 30 vertical metres below the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent).
- 23) Licensees must use the logs from the well to determine the exact plug placement for wells drilled deeper than the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent).

- 24) All plugs run at a depth less than 1500 m TVD must be a minimum length of 30 vertical metres, and they must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres below and a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the zone being covered.
- 25) All plugs run at a depth greater than 1500 m TVD must be a minimum length of 60 vertical metres, and they must extend a minimum of 30 vertical metres below and a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the zone being covered.

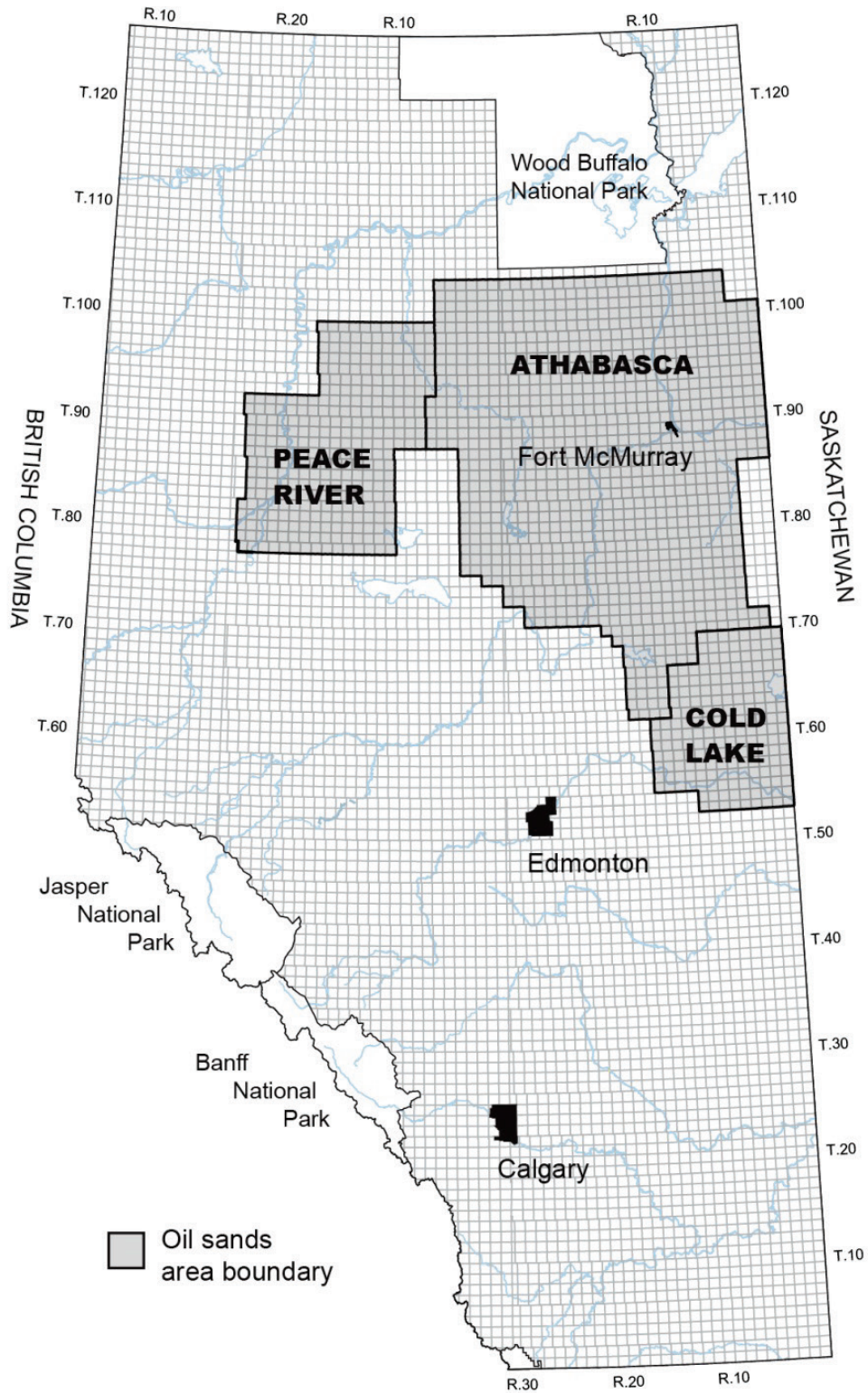
A plug may extend over more than one zone.

- 26) Any plug may be staged; however, the break between stages in a multistage plug must occur within a zone and must not occur at a zone top.

There is no maximum distance between plugs as long as the pressure from the zone being isolated does not exceed the fracture pressure of the interval left open above it.

- 27) The top plug must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the casing shoe of the deepest casing set.

Examples of plugging programs are provided in figures 2a, b, c, and d.



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Open Government Licence – Alberta

Figure 1. Oil sands area boundary

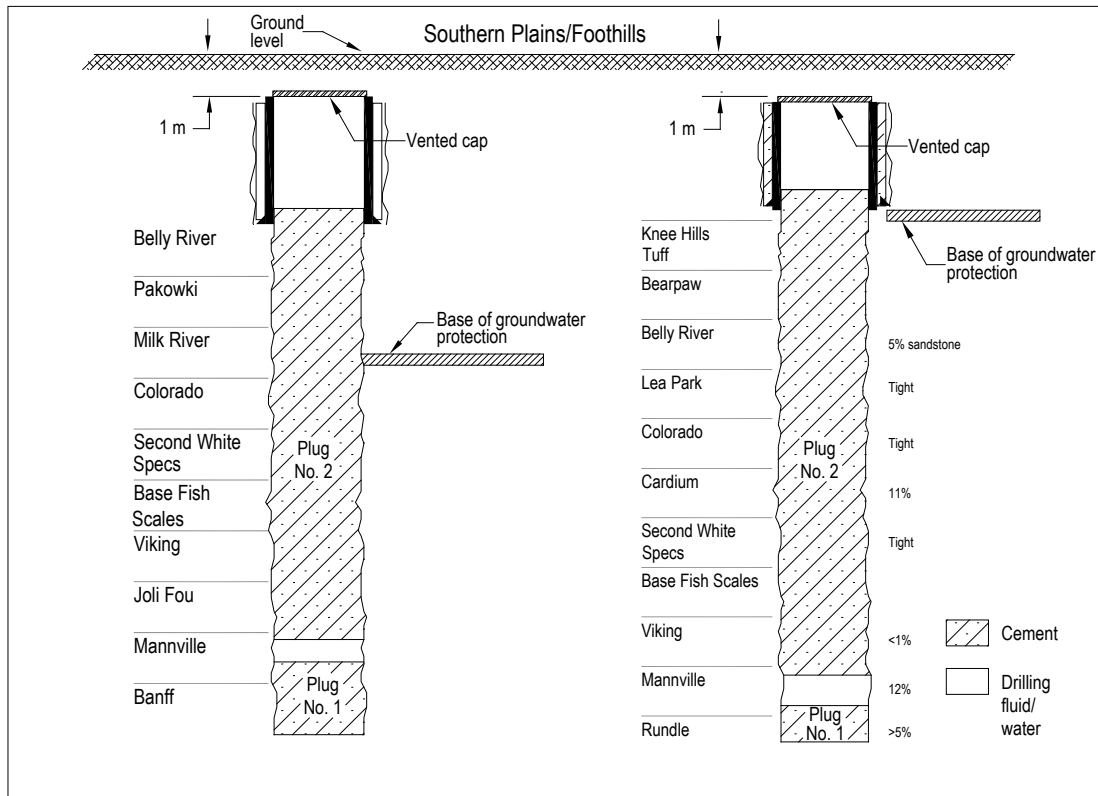


Figure 2a. Plug placement examples for Southern Plains/Foothills

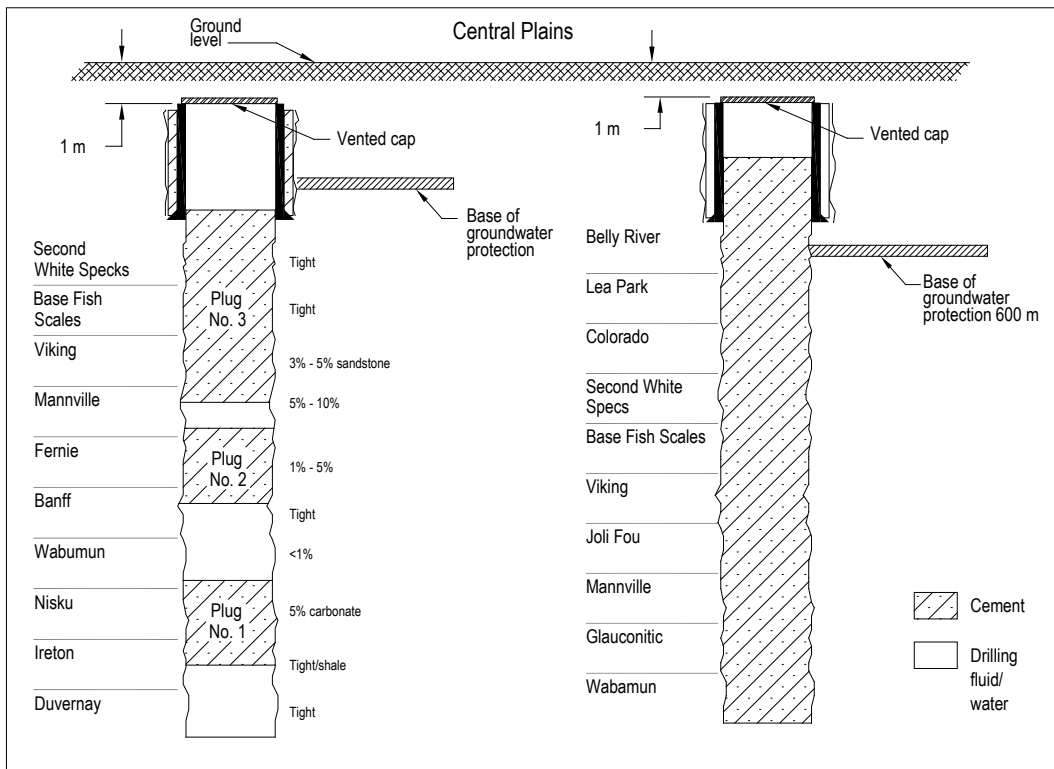


Figure 2b. Plug placement examples for Central Plains

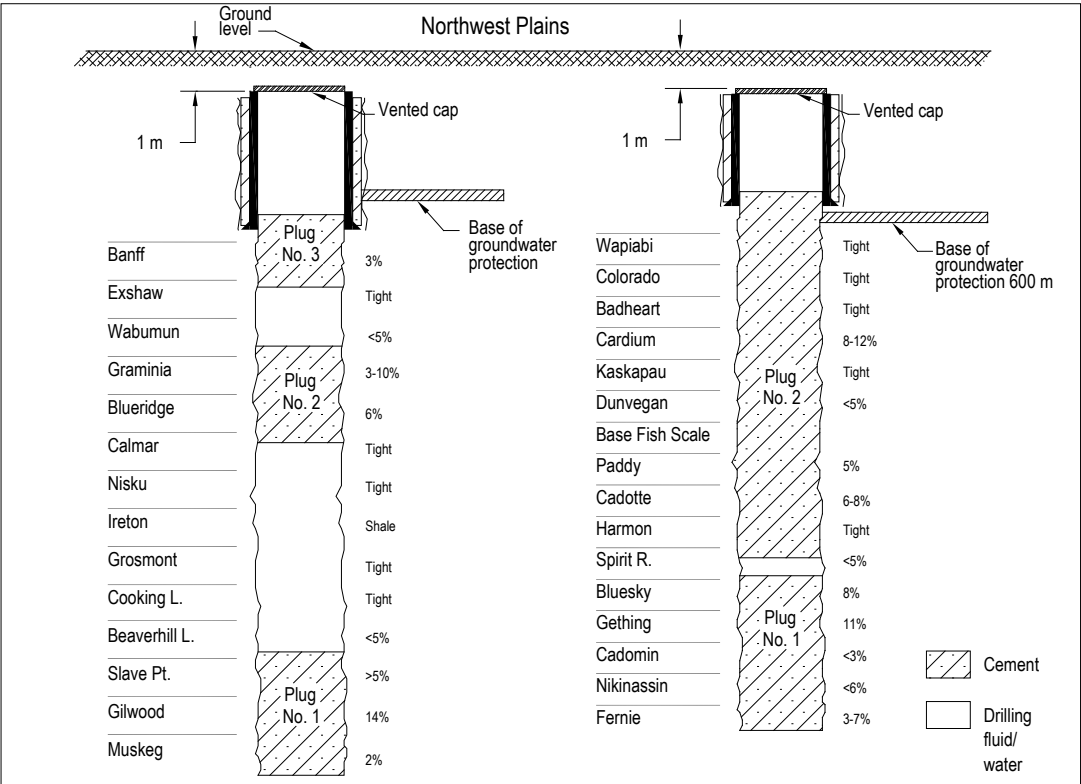


Figure 2c. Plug placement examples for Northwest Plains

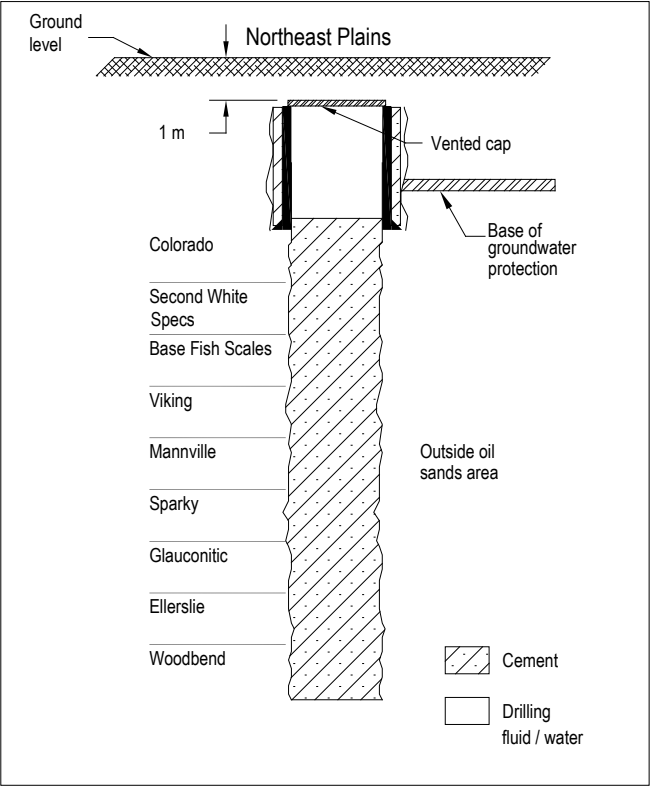


Figure 2d. Plug placement example for Northeast Plains

4.2 Open-Hole Abandonment of Wells That Have Penetrated Oil Sands Zones

- 28) For wells that are in an oil sands area (see figure 1 and tables below) and have penetrated oil sands zones, thermal cement must be used for the entire length of the plug that is across the oil sands zones. Thermal cement is a blend that after curing for 48 hours has a minimum compressive strength of 3500 kPa at temperatures up to 360°C.

Cold Lake Oil Sands Area

| Township | Ranges |
|----------|----------------|
| 053–054 | 01W4M to 09W4M |
| 055–061 | 01W4M to 13W4M |
| 062–066 | 01W4M to 11W4M |
| 067–069 | 01W4M to 08W4M |

Athabasca Oil Sands Area

| Township | Ranges |
|----------|----------------|
| 062–066 | 12W4M to 15W4M |
| 067–068 | 09W4M to 15W4M |
| 069 | 09W4M to 16W4M |
| 070 | 02W4M to 17W4M |
| 071 | 02W4M to 24W4M |
| 072 | 04W4M to 24W4M |
| 073–074 | 04W4M to 26W4M |
| 075 | 04W4M to 02W5M |
| 076–085 | 04W4M to 04W5M |
| 086–087 | 01W4M to 04W5M |
| 088–092 | 01W4M to 07W5M |
| 093–100 | 01W4M to 06W5M |
| 101–103 | 04W4M to 06W5M |

Peace River Oil Sands Area

| Township | Ranges |
|----------|----------------|
| 78–82 | 11W5M to 25W5M |
| 83–87 | 11W5M to 24W5M |
| 88–92 | 08W4M to 24W5M |
| 93–99 | 07W4M to 17W5M |

4.3 Wells in the Cold Lake/Athabasca Oil Sands Area

- 29) A thermal plug must be set from the well's total depth to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the top of the Grand Rapids Formation.
- 30) All zones above the top of the Mannville Group (or equivalent) must be covered with a plug that is placed in one or more stages.

For intervals that are not across an oil sands zone, the use of fillers or additives in the cement is acceptable if the compressive strength of the mixture is at least 3500 kPa after curing for 48 hours.

- 31) Any plug may be staged; however, the break between stages in a multistage plug must occur within a zone and must not occur at a zone top.
- 32) The top plug must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the casing shoe of the deepest casing set.

An example plugging program is provided in figure 3.

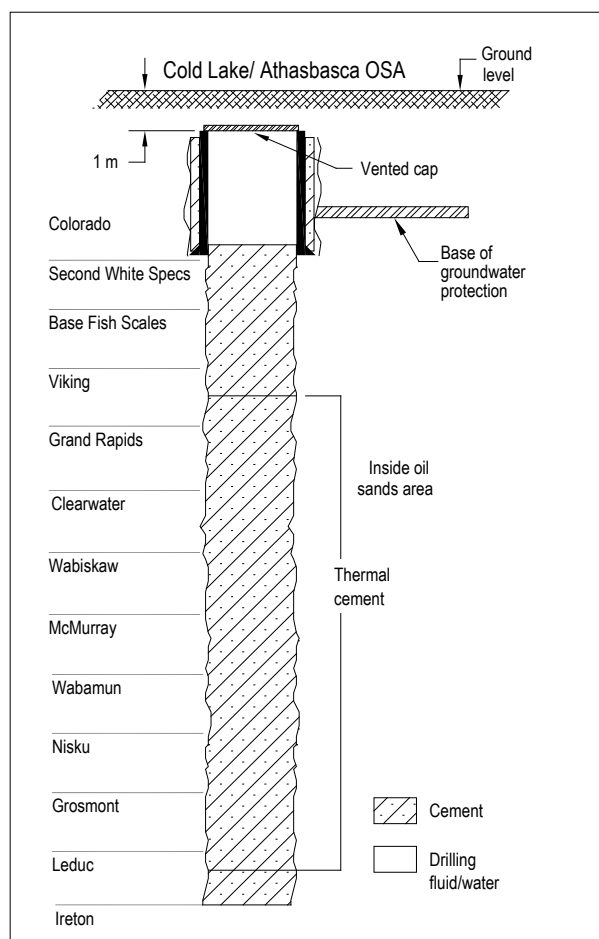


Figure 3. Plug placement example for Cold Lake/Athabasca Oil Sands Area

4.4 Wells in the Peace River Oil Sands Area

- 33) All zones above the top of the Spirit River Group must be covered with a plug that is placed in one or more stages. This plug must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the top of the Spirit River Group.
- 34) Licensees must use the logs from the well to determine the exact plug placement for coverage and/or isolation of porous zones below the top of the Spirit River Group.

For intervals that are not across oil sands zones, the use of fillers or additives in the cement is acceptable if the compressive strength of the mixture is at least 3500 kPa after curing for 48 hours.

- 35) A thermal plug must be set that extends from a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the base of any oil sands zone to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the top of the oil sands zone.
- 36) All plugs run at a depth less than 1500 m TVD must be a minimum length of 30 vertical metres, and they must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres below and a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the zone being covered.
- 37) All plugs run at a depth greater than 1500 m TVD must be a minimum length of 60 vertical metres, and they must extend a minimum of 30 vertical metres below and a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the zone being covered.

A plug may extend over more than one zone.

- 38) Any plug may be staged; however, the break between stages in a multistage plug must occur within a zone and must not occur at a zone top.

There is no maximum distance between plugs as long as the pressure from the zone being isolated does not exceed the fracture pressure of the interval left open above it.

- 39) The top plug must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the casing shoe of the deepest casing set.

An example of a plugging program is provided in figure 4.

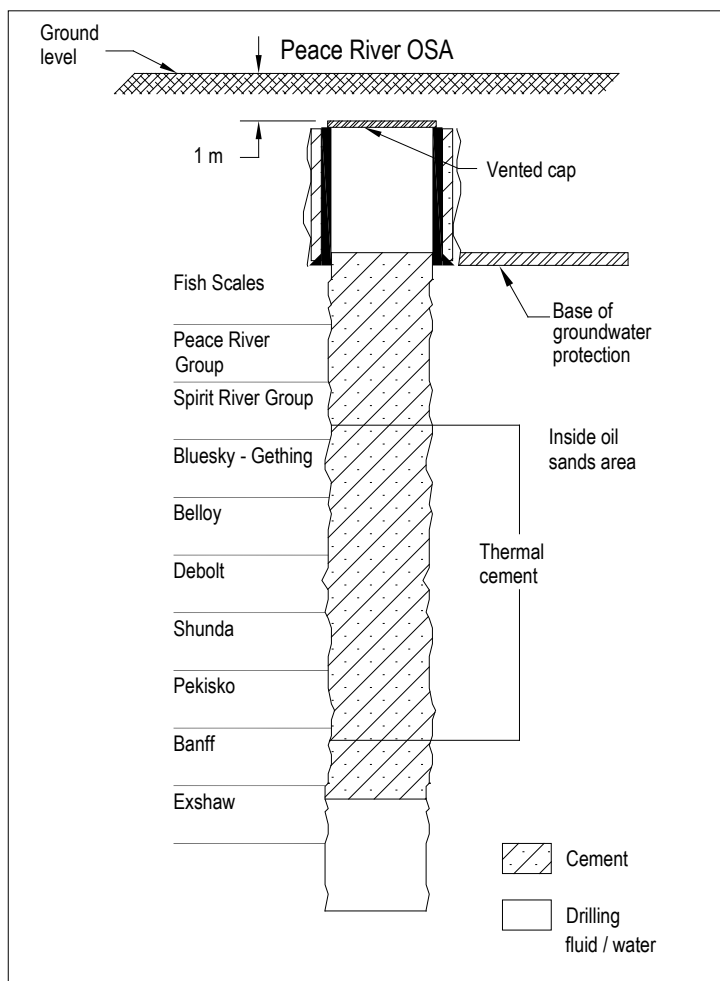


Figure 4. Plug placement example for Peace River Oil Sands Area

4.5 Confirming Plug Placement

40) The licensee must confirm the location of all plugs using one of the approved methods described in section 6.

The only time a plug location does not have to be confirmed is if

- one stage of a multistage plug is placed, provided there is no loss of circulation;
- continuous cement is run from total depth to surface in one or more stages, provided there was no loss of circulation; or
- the top plug is placed, providing it is run to surface.

Plugs that are too low or too high or were misplaced are unacceptable (see figure 5).

41) The licensee must correct the misplaced plug and must confirm the new location.

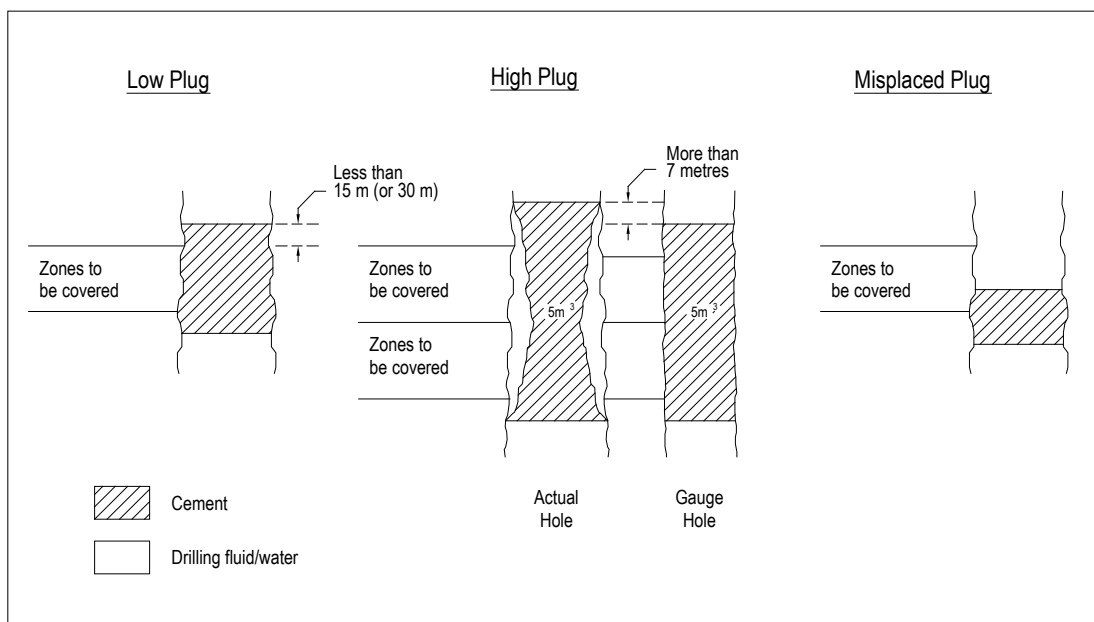


Figure 5. Unacceptable plugs

Regarding figure 5:

Plug is too low:

- For zones at a depth less than 1500 m TVD, a low plug is any plug with a top less than 15 vertical metres above the zone it was intended to cover.
- For zones at a depth greater than 1500 m TVD, a low plug is any plug with a top less than 30 vertical metres above the zone it was intended to cover.

42) **Action required:** Low plugs must be built up and then the new location must be confirmed.

Plug is too high: A plug that is located more than 7 vertical metres above its theoretical top is considered “high.” To calculate a plug’s theoretical top, use the formula

$$\text{Actual cement volume (m}^3\text{)}/\text{gauge hole volume (m}^3\text{/m)} = x \text{ m}$$

$$\text{Drill pipe setting depth (m)} - x \text{ m} = \text{Theoretical top}$$

43) **Action required:** High plugs must be circulated or drilled out. The plug must be rerun and its location confirmed.

Plug is misplaced: The plug was positioned in such a way that it did not cover the zones it was intended to cover.

44) **Action required:** Depending on its position, a misplaced plug may first have to be circulated or drilled out. The plug must be rerun and its location confirmed.

4.6 Oil Sands Evaluation Wells and Test-Hole Wells

Oil sands evaluation and test-hole wells (as identified by “OV” and “TH” respectively on the licence’s AER Classification) have specific abandonment requirements. These wells are drilled for core samples only and are not intended to be completed.

- 45) Downhole abandonment operations on oil sands evaluation and test-hole wells in the surface mineable areas must be completed within 30 days after drilling has finished.
- 46) Downhole abandonment operations on oil sands evaluation and test-hole wells that are outside of the surface mineable areas must be completed prior to rig release.
- 47) Oil sands evaluation and test-hole wells that encounter an oil sands zone and/or are within a designated oil sands area must be filled with thermal cement from final total depth to surface.
- 48) Test-hole wells that are drilled outside a designated oil sands area and do not encounter an oil sands zone must be filled with cement that has a final compressive strength of at least 3500 kPa after curing for 48 hours from final total depth to surface.
- 49) Any drop in cement due to pipe displacement must be replaced by an equivalent volume of nonsaline water. If the calculated and actual volumes required to fill the hole coincide, fluid level testing is not required.
- 50) Surface abandonment operations must be completed immediately after downhole operations.
- 51) Oil sands evaluation and test-hole well abandonments are considered routine and must be reported within 30 days of completing the surface abandonment.

5 Cased-Hole Abandonment Requirements

- 52) In a cased-hole abandonment, the licensee must do the following:
 - a) Cover all nonsaline groundwater with cement.
 - b) Abandon each completed pool separately unless the pool has been identified by the AER as one which may be abandoned together with one or more other pools.

A list of subsurface geological strata and corresponding geographic locations for potential wells that may be abandoned in a commingled manner is available from the *Directive 020* webpage on our website, www.aer.ca. These wells may be abandoned routinely in accordance with the applicable requirements in this directive.

The abandonment program for a cased-hole well will depend on whether

- the well was completed,
- the well penetrated any oil sands zones, and

- the well has been completed in an interval that is classified as “level A.”

For the purpose of this directive, level-A intervals are intervals that

- have been used for disposal of 1a or 1b fluids,
- have been used for injection of acid gas,
- have a hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) concentration in excess of 15 per cent, or
- have been designated as critical sour.

This evaluation is done on a well (not a pool) basis.

Note that it is advisable to perform testing prior to beginning downhole abandonment operations to avoid having to re-enter the well to correct a wellbore problem. Refer to section 7.

5.1 Cement Evaluation

- 53) The licensee must review the existing cement behind the casing strings of a well before beginning abandonment operations.

5.1.1 Cement Top Determination

The cement top can be determined by available locating log data, theoretical calculations, or a cement evaluation log. Confirmation of cement returns to surface in the drilling tour sheets during primary cementing is also acceptable for confirming cement coverage to surface.

- 54) A cement evaluation log must be run if
- a) theoretical calculations (using an excess of 20 per cent) indicate that the cement top does not extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the uppermost porous intervals, or
 - b) there is a surface casing vent flow or gas migration issue present.

5.1.2 Identification of Porous Intervals

- 55) The licensee must identify porous zones (see glossary) in order to determine whether they are hydraulically isolated.

5.1.3 Remedial Cementing

- 56) For protected intervals that are not isolated from each other and for all porous zones that are not isolated from each other, the licensee must perforate or slot the casing in order to circulate cement to surface. If circulation of cement to surface is not possible, cement squeezes must be conducted, but intervals must be squeezed individually to ensure isolation.

Cement squeezing multiple intervals at the same time is considered **nonroutine**.

For remediation of surface casing vent flows, gas migration, or both, see *Directive 087*.

5.2 Use of Inhibitor

- 57) The casing must be filled with nonsaline water from the uppermost abandoned zone (that is below the BGWP) to surface.
- 58) Inhibitor must not be used inside the casing over intervals that are above the BGWP.
- 59) For intervals below the BGWP that are isolated from the BGWP by an approved zonal abandonment method, the casing must be filled with either noncorrosive fluid or nonsaline water

5.3 Wells Not Penetrating Oil Sands Zones

Requirements for abandonment operations on cased-hole wells that **do not** penetrate oil sands zones are as follows.

5.3.1 Noncompleted Wells

Noncompleted wells without liners do not require additional cement plugs to be run if the existing casing string is pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

- 60) Noncompleted wells must be filled with nonsaline water.

5.3.2 Wells With a Cemented Liner

- 61) The completed interval must be abandoned in accordance with the requirements set out in sections 5.3.5, 5.3.6, or 5.3.7. Following abandonment of the completed intervals, the licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning a liner top in a well with a cemented liner.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

- 62) For non-level-A intervals, the licensee must set a permanent bridge plug within 15 m above the liner top.
- 63) If the licensee is unable to set the bridge plug as required by 62, then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
 - a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and

- c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 64) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 65) The plug must be capped with either a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement or with a minimum of 3 vertical metres of resin-based, low-permeability gypsum cement.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Plug

- 66) A cement plug must be set across the liner top. This plug must extend from a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the liner top to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the liner top.
- 67) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 68) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

5.3.3 Wells With an Uncemented Liner

- 69) To abandon a well with an uncemented liner across more than one zone, the zones behind the liner must be evaluated for porosity, and cement squeezes must be conducted to ensure isolation between the porous zones.
- 70) Once the liner has been cemented, the requirements set out for abandonment of wells with a cemented liner (above) must be followed.

5.3.4 Wells With Casing Patching, Casing Failures, and Previously Cement Squeezed Intervals

- 71) For non-level-A intervals, the licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning casing patches, casing failures (within one zone), and previously cement squeezed intervals (within one zone that have been drilled out).
 - a) For abandonment of previously cement squeezed intervals that have been drilled out and are over more than one zone, each zone must be isolated by one of the methods below.
 - b) For abandonment of casing failures that occur over more than one zone, a cement squeeze must be conducted as set out below in option 2.
- 72) Casing patches, casing failures, and previously cement squeezed intervals (that have been drilled out) that are over a level-A interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.5.1.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

- 73) The licensee must set a permanent bridge plug within 15 m above the interval.
- 74) If the licensee is unable to set a bridge plug as required by 73, then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
 - a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and
 - c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 75) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 76) The plug must be capped with either a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement or with a minimum of 3 vertical metres of resin-based, low-permeability gypsum cement.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Plug/Squeezing Cement

- 77) A cement plug must be set that extends a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the bottom of the interval to a minimum 15 vertical metres above the top of the interval.
- 78) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 79) The plug must be pressure tested to 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

If the licensee elects to apply a squeeze pressure to the cement, the AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 2 of section 5.3.5.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).

5.3.5 Zonal Abandonment Within a Completed Well (Vertical/Deviated) or a Horizontal Well Completed in a Single Formation

5.3.5.1 Level-A Intervals

- 80) When abandoning level-A intervals within a completed well (vertical/deviated) or within a horizontal well completed with an open-hole interval that penetrates a single formation, the licensee must use one of the following options.

Option 1 – Setting a Cement Retainer

- 81) A cement retainer must be set in one of the following ways:
- a) In vertical/deviated wells, the retainer must be set within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
 - b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, the retainer must be set within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
- 82) The retainer must be pressure tested to a stabilized pressure that equates to a minimum differential pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 83) A cement squeeze must be conducted through the retainer in one of the following ways:
- a) In vertical/deviated wells, the minimum cement volume must equal the casing volume from the bottom of the retainer to the bottom perforation (or bottom of the open-hole section) plus 0.5 m³.
 - b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, the minimum cement volume must equal the casing volume from the bottom of the retainer to the measured total depth of the well plus 0.5 m³.
- 84) The final squeeze pressure must be a minimum of 7000 kPa above the current reservoir pressure of the zone being abandoned.
- 85) The retainer must be capped with class “G” cement that is circulated in place and
- a) is a minimum of 30 vertical metres in length,
 - b) has a minimum volume of 1 m³, and
 - c) additionally, in vertical/deviated wells *only*, the cement must extend a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 86) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if the retainer is drilled out, following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 87) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.5.1.

Option 2 – Squeezing Cement

- 88) A cement squeeze must be conducted into the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.

- 89) The plug must
 - a) be circulated in place,
 - b) have a minimum volume of 1 m³, and
 - c) in vertical/deviated wells, extend from either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the completion or total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the formation top, or
 - d) in horizontal wells completed within a single formation, extend from at or below the formation top to a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 90) The final squeeze pressure must be a minimum of 7000 kPa above the current reservoir pressure of the zone being abandoned.
- 91) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 92) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 93) For vertical/deviated wells *only*, if this plug is to be drilled out, following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 94) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.5.1.

Option 3 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

Abandonment of a level-A interval by this method will require nonroutine approval from the AER (WellOperations@aer.ca).

- 95) A bond log must be run over the interval where a permanent bridge plug will be set to a minimum of 60 m above the formation top. The bond log and the log interpretation must be submitted in the nonroutine request. If zonal isolation is confirmed, approval may be granted to set a permanent bridge plug,
 - a) in vertical/deviated wells, within 15 metres above the perforation or the single-zone open-hole section, or
 - b) in horizontal wells completed within a single formation, within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
- 96) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

- 97) The plug must be capped with class “G” cement that is circulated in place and
- a) is a minimum of 60 vertical metres in length,
 - b) extends a minimum of 60 vertical metres above the formation top, and
 - c) has a minimum volume of 1 m³.
- 98) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the bridge plug prior to capping with cement, the bridge plug must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

5.3.5.2 Non-Level-A Intervals

- 99) The licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning non-level-A intervals within a completed well (vertical/deviated) or within a completed horizontal well with an open-hole interval that penetrates a single formation.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

- 100) The licensee must do one of the following:
- a) In a vertical/deviated well, set a permanent bridge plug within 15 metres above the perforation or the single-zone open-hole section.
 - b) In a horizontal well completed within a single formation, set a permanent bridge plug within 15 vertical metres above top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
 - c) If the licensee is unable to set a bridge plug as required by 100(a) or (b), then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
 - i) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - ii) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and
 - iii) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 101) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 102) The plug must be capped with either a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement or with a minimum of 3 vertical metres of resin-based, low-permeability gypsum cement.

- 103) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the bridge plug prior to capping with cement, the bridge plug must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Retainer

- 104) A cement retainer must be set in one of the following ways:
- a) In a vertical/deviated well, a cement retainer must be set within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
 - b) In a horizontal well completed within a single formation, a cement retainer must be set within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
- 105) The retainer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes. A cement squeeze must be conducted through the retainer. The AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 1 of section 5.3.5.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).
- 106) The retainer must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement.
- 107) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if the retainer is drilled out, following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 108) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.4.

Option 3 – Setting a Plug in a Permanent Packer

This option is only available to vertical/deviated wells.

- 109) The licensee must set a permanent plug in a permanent packer within 15 m above the perforation or the single-zone open-hole section.
- 110) If the licensee is unable to set a permanent plug as required by 109, then a permanent plug must be set in a permanent packer located at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
- a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,

- b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the permanent plug and packer will be set, and
 - c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 111) The plug and packer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 112) The plug and packer must be capped with either a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement or a minimum of 3 vertical metres of resin-based, low-permeability gypsum cement.
- 113) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the plug and packer prior to capping with cement, the plug and packer must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

Option 4 – Setting a Cement Plug/Squeezing Cement

- 114) The licensee must do one of the following:
- a) In vertical/deviated wells, a cement plug must be set across the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section. The plug must extend either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the completed interval or the plug-back total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the top of the completed interval. It is acceptable to run a continuous cement plug across multiple completed zones.
 - b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, a cement squeeze must be conducted into the open-hole interval. The plug must extend from at or below the formation top to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 115) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 116) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- If the licensee elects to apply a squeeze pressure to the cement, the AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 2 of section 5.3.5.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).
- 117) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if the cement plug is to be drilled out, a cement squeeze must be conducted. Following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 118) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.4.

5.3.6 Completed Horizontal Wells Across Multiple Formations

- 119) For a horizontal open-hole interval that penetrates multiple formations, each porous formation must have a cement plug set in the open-hole section to either cover or isolate it from different porous formations.
 - a) A minimum 30 vertical metre cement plug is required, extending either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the formation or the plug-back total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the porous formation.
- 120) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 121) If *any* of the horizontal intervals is a level-A interval, the uppermost interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.3.5.1.

5.4 Wells Penetrating Oil Sands Zones

Requirements for abandonment operations on cased-hole wells that are in an oil sands area (see figure 1) and penetrate oil sands zones are as follows.

5.4.1 Thermal Cement

- 122) Thermal cement must be used when abandoning wellbores that penetrate oil sands. Thermal cement is a blend that after curing for 48 hours has a minimum compressive strength of 3500 kPa at temperatures up to 360°C.

5.4.2 Noncompleted Wells

- 123) The casing string must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 124) All noncompleted oil sands zones must have a thermal cement plug run across the oil sands formation.
 - a) The plug must extend from either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the formation or the plug-back total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation. This plug may be combined into a longer plug to cover two or more uncompleted oil sands zones.
 - b) Nonsaline water must be used between plugs.
- 125) The location of suspended cement plugs must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6. The location of cement plugs that are circulated in place from a bridge plug top or plug-back total depth do not need to be confirmed.
- 126) Noncompleted wells with liners must have the liner abandoned in accordance with sections 5.4.3 or 5.4.4.

5.4.3 Wells With a Cemented Liner

- 127) The completed interval must be abandoned in accordance with the requirements set out below for completed, open-hole, or horizontal intervals (see section 5.4.6, 5.4.7, or 5.4.8). Following abandonment of the completed intervals, the licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning a liner top in a well with a cemented liner.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

- 128) The licensee must set a permanent bridge plug within 15 m above the liner top.
- 129) If the licensee is unable to set the permanent bridge plug as required by 128, then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
- a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and
 - c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 130) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 131) The plug must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of thermal cement.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Plug

- 132) A thermal cement plug must be set across the liner top.
- 133) This plug must extend from a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the liner top to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the liner top.
- 134) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 135) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

5.4.4 Wells With an Uncemented Liner

- 136) To abandon a well with an uncemented liner across more than one zone, the zones behind the liner must be evaluated for porosity, and thermal cement squeezes must be conducted to ensure isolation between the porous zones.

- 137) Once the liner has been cemented, the requirements set out for abandonment of wells with a cemented liner (section 5.4.3) must be followed.

5.4.5 Wells with Casing Patching, Casing Failures, and Previously Cement Squeezed Intervals

- 138) For non-level-A intervals, the licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning casing patches, casing failures within one zone, and previously cement squeezed intervals within one zone that have been drilled out.
- a) For abandonment of previously cement squeezed intervals that have been drilled out and are over more than one zone, each zone must be isolated by one of the methods below.
 - b) For abandonment of casing failures that occur over more than one zone, a cement squeeze must be conducted as set out below in option 2.
- 139) Casing patches, casing failures, and previously cement squeezed intervals (that have been drilled out) that are over a level-A interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.6.1.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

- 140) The licensee must set a permanent bridge plug within 15 m above the interval.
- 141) If the licensee is unable to set a permanent bridge plug as required by 140, then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
- a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and
 - c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 142) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 143) The plug must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of thermal cement.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Plug /Squeezing Cement

- 144) A thermal cement plug must be set that extends a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the bottom of the interval to a minimum 15 vertical metres above the top of the interval.

- 145) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
- 146) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes. If the licensee elects to apply a squeeze pressure to the cement, the AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 2 of section 5.4.6.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).

5.4.6 Zonal Abandonment Within a Completed Well (Vertical/Deviated) or a Completed Horizontal Well in a Single Formation

- 147) The licensee must review the well logs to determine which oil sands zones have been penetrated by the well.
- 148) Oil sands zones that have been penetrated but not completed must have a thermal cement plug run in accordance with section 5.4.2.
- 149) Each oil sands zone that is completed must be abandoned using one of the following options.

5.4.6.1 Level-A Intervals

- 150) The licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning level-A intervals within a completed vertical/deviated well or within a completed horizontal well with an open-hole interval that penetrates a single formation.

Option 1 – Setting a Cement Retainer

- 151) A cement retainer must be set in one of the following ways:
 - a) In vertical/deviated wells, a cement retainer must be set within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
 - b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, a cement retainer must be set within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
- 152) The retainer must be pressure tested to a stabilized pressure that equates to a minimum differential pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 153) A thermal cement squeeze must be conducted through the retainer in one of the following ways:
 - a) In vertical/deviated wells, the minimum cement volume must equal the casing volume from the bottom of the retainer to the bottom perforation (or bottom of the open-hole section) plus 0.5 m³.

- b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, the minimum cement volume must equal the casing volume from the bottom of the retainer to the measured total depth plus 0.5 m³.
- 154) The final squeeze pressure must be a minimum of 7000 kPa above the current reservoir pressure of the zone being abandoned.
- 155) The retainer must be capped with thermal cement that is circulated in place and
 - a) is a minimum of 30 vertical metres in length,
 - b) has a minimum volume of 1 m³, and
 - c) additionally, for vertical/deviated wells *only*, the cement must extend a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 156) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if the retainer is drilled out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 157) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.6.1.

Option 2 – Squeezing Cement

- 158) A thermal cement squeeze must be conducted into the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
- 159) The plug must
 - a) be circulated in place,
 - b) have a minimum volume of 1 m³, and
 - c) in vertical/deviated wells, extend from either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the completion or total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 30 vertical metres above the formation top, or
 - d) in horizontal wells completed within a single formation, extend from at or below the formation top to a minimum 30 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 160) The final squeeze pressure must be a minimum of 7000 kPa above the current reservoir pressure of the zone being abandoned.
- 161) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.

- 162) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 163) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if this plug is to be drilled out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 164) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.6.1.

Option 3 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

Abandonment of a level-A interval by this method will require nonroutine approval from the AER (WellOperations@aer.ca).

- 165) A bond log must be run over the interval where a permanent bridge plug will be set to a minimum of 60 m above the formation top. The bond log and the log interpretation must be submitted in the nonroutine request. If zonal isolation is confirmed, approval may be granted to set a permanent bridge plug within 15 metres above the perforation or the single-zone open-hole section
 - a) in vertical/deviated wells or
 - b) in horizontal wells completed within a single formation, within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.
- 166) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 167) The plug must be capped with thermal cement that is circulated in place and
 - a) is a minimum of 60 vertical metres in length,
 - b) extends a minimum of 60 vertical metres above the formation top, and
 - c) has a minimum volume of 1 m³.
- 168) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the bridge plug prior to capping with cement, the bridge plug must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

5.4.6.2 Non-Level-A Intervals

- 169) The licensee must use one of the following options for abandoning non-level-A intervals within a completed vertical/deviated well or within a completed horizontal well with an open-hole interval that penetrates a single formation.

Option 1 – Setting a Permanent Bridge Plug

170) The licensee must do one of the following:

- a) In vertical/deviated wells, set a permanent bridge plug within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
- b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, set a permanent bridge plug within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.

171) If the licensee is unable to set a permanent bridge plug as required by 170(a) or (b), then a permanent bridge plug must be set at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:

- i) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
- ii) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the bridge plug will be set, and
- iii) the depth is below the BGWP.

172) Once the bridge plug has been set, it must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

173) The plug must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of thermal cement. The cement top must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the formation top.

174) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the bridge plug prior to capping with cement, the bridge plug must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

A retainer that has not been activated can be substituted for the permanent bridge plug.

Option 2 – Setting a Cement Retainer

175) A cement retainer must be set in one of the following ways:

- a) In vertical/deviated wells, a cement retainer must be set within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
- b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, a cement retainer must be set within 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation in which the horizontal zone is completed.

176) The retainer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

- 177) A thermal cement squeeze must be conducted through the retainer.
- 178) The retainer must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of thermal cement.
 - a) The cement top must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the formation top.
The AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 1 of section 5.4.6.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).
- 179) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if this plug is to be drilled out, following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.
- 180) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed intervals must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.5.

Option 3 – Setting a Plug in a Permanent Packer

This option is only available to vertical/deviated wells.

- 181) The licensee must set a permanent plug in a permanent packer within 15 metres above the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section.
- 182) If the licensee is unable to set a permanent plug as required by 181, then a permanent plug must be set in a permanent packer located at a depth where all of the following conditions are met:
 - a) the depth is within the same formation as the completed interval or within the next formation provided there are no other effective porous zones located between the bridge plug setting depth and completed interval,
 - b) the cement top behind the casing extends above the top of the formation in which the permanent plug and packer will be set, and
 - c) the depth is below the BGWP.
- 183) The plug and packer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 184) The plug must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of thermal cement.
- 185) The cement top must extend a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the formation top.
- 186) If more than one year has elapsed from the setting and pressure testing of the plug and packer prior to capping with cement, the plug and packer must be pressure tested again at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

Option 4 – Setting a Cement Plug/Squeezing Cement

187) The licensee must do one of the following:

- a) In vertical/deviated wells, a thermal cement plug must be set across the perforations or the single-zone open-hole section. The plug must extend either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the completed interval or the plug-back total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the top of the formation. It is acceptable to run a continuous thermal cement plug across multiple zones. Or,
- b) In horizontal wells completed within a single formation, a thermal cement squeeze must be conducted into the open-hole interval. The plug must extend from at or below the formation top to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the formation top.

188) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.

189) The plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

If the licensee elects to apply a squeeze pressure to the cement, the AER recommends following the criteria set out in option 2 of section 5.4.6.1 (minimum cement volumes, final squeeze pressures, etc.).

190) In vertical/deviated wells *only*, if the cement plug is to be drilled out, a cement squeeze must be conducted.

- a) Following drill-out, the squeezed interval must be pressure tested for 10 minutes at a stabilized pressure equal to the greater of 7000 kPa or 85 per cent of the current or expected reservoir pressure of the perforations that will be open to the wellbore.

191) At the time of well abandonment, the squeezed interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.5.

5.4.7 Completed Horizontal Wells Across Multiple Formations

192) For a horizontal open-hole interval that penetrates multiple formations, each porous formation must have a thermal cement plug set in the open-hole section to either cover or isolate it from different porous formations.

- a) A minimum 30 vertical metre thermal cement plug is required, extending either a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the formation or the plug-back total depth, whichever is shallower, to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the porous formation.
- b) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.

- 193) If *any* of the horizontal intervals is a level-A interval, the uppermost interval must be abandoned in accordance with section 5.4.6.1.

5.5 Groundwater Protection

- 194) All nonsaline groundwater must be covered by cement. Groundwater protection must include the identification and isolation of the BGWP from hydrocarbon formations below, as well as the identification and isolation of all protected intervals that are above the BGWP.

To determine the BGWP depth for a well, refer to the Base of Groundwater Protection Query Tool available on the AER website under System & Tools. The elevations provided in the tool are subsea and will need to be converted to kelly bushing.

A protected interval is an interval that is above the BGWP and is defined as

- any lithology with greater than 3 per cent porosity, or
- any coal seam.

Protected intervals may be grouped together (i.e., not isolated), provided that

- the lithologies with greater than 3 per cent porosity are not separated from each other by more than 10 m, and
- the coal seams are not separated by
 - more than 30 m of non-coal-bearing-strata, or
 - a sandstone (of any vertical extent) with greater than 3 per cent porosity.

5.5.1 Remedial Cementing of Protected Intervals

- 195) The licensee must use one of the following options to cover or isolate all protected intervals.

Option 1 – Removing Casing and Setting a Cement Plug

- 196) Prior to pulling the casing, all downhole abandonment operations must be completed in accordance with *Directive 020* (or any nonroutine approval that may be in place).

If the casing is free below the BGWP, the licensee may cut and pull the casing. Casing removal schemes that meet the following requirements are **routine**. Any casing string other than the surface casing may be removed.

- 197) The cut point must be identified at or below the BGWP.
- 198) A permanent bridge plug must be set a minimum of 15 m below the intended cut point.
- 199) The bridge plug must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 200) The casing must be cut at the cut point identified.

- 201) Once the casing is cut and pulled, a cement plug must be set from the bridge plug to a minimum of 15 m above the surface casing shoe.
- 202) The cement plug must be located and pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- 203) If the casing is unsuccessfully recovered, the AER (WellOperations@aer.ca) must be contacted.

Option 2 – Perforating, Milling, or Slotting Casing

- 204) The licensee must perforate, mill, or slot the casing at the BGWP and attempt to establish circulation to the surface with nonsaline water. A maximum of 1 m³ of acid may be used to establish circulation.

5.5.1.1 Circulation to Surface Is Successful

- 205) If circulation to surface is successful, the licensee must pump cement to surface by either setting a cement retainer above the perforations or the milled or slotted casing or by circulating cement to surface and leaving a cement plug across the perforations, milled, or slotted casing.
 - a) If a retainer is used, the cement retainer must be set within 15 m above the perforations or the milled or slotted casing.
 - i) The retainer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
 - ii) Following pumping of cement, the retainer must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement.
 - b) If a retainer is not used, a bridge or wiper plug must be set as close as possible below the perforations or the milled or slotted casing.
 - i) The cement top inside the casing must be a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the perforations or the milled or slotted casing.
 - ii) The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
 - iii) The plug must be pressure tested to a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.

5.5.1.2 Circulation to Surface Is Unsuccessful

- 206) If circulation to surface is unsuccessful, the licensee must attempt to establish a feed rate.
 - a) If a feed rate can be established, cement squeezes must be conducted, without exceeding the formation fracture pressure, into the perforations or the milled or slotted casing for

each interval individually, to ensure isolation. Cement squeezing multiple intervals at the same time is considered as **nonroutine**.

- i) If a retainer is used for the above operations, the licensee must do the following:
 - The cement retainer must be set within 15 m above the perforations or the milled or slotted casing.
 - The retainer must be pressure tested at a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
 - The retainer must be capped with a minimum of 8 vertical metres of class “G” cement.
- ii) If a retainer is not used for the above operations, the licensee must do the following:
 - A cement plug must be set from a minimum of 15 vertical metres below the perforations or the milled or slotted casing to a minimum of 15 vertical metres above the perforations or the milled or slotted casing.
 - The location of the plug must be confirmed by one of the approved methods described in section 6.
 - The plug must be pressure tested to a stabilized pressure of 7000 kPa for 10 minutes.
- b) If the attempts to establish a feed rate are unsuccessful, *after* reasonable efforts have been made without exceeding the fracture pressure, the perforations must be abandoned in accordance with one of the options set out in section 5.3.5.2. Examples of “reasonable efforts” when dealing with low fluid injectivity rate include acidizing, swabbing, and surging or any operation to improve fluid injectivity to promote cement placement.

The licensee must then evaluate the wellbore to ensure that all protected intervals above the BGWP are isolated from each other.

5.5.2 Requesting a Groundwater Protection Waiver

207) The AER requires that all protected intervals be covered by cement.

In specific situations, the AER may consider industry requests to waive the requirement to cover protected intervals. Abandonment operations for which a groundwater waiver is requested are nonroutine.

A written assessment containing the required information must be completed by the licensee and submitted to the AER at WellOperations@aer.ca (see section 2.1).

- 208) The written assessment must include
- a) the surface casing/conductor pipe depth,
 - b) the production casing cement tops and method of identification,
 - c) the BGWP, and
 - d) confirmation by a qualified log analyst of the absence of protected intervals between the cement top and the surface casing/conductor pipe setting depth.
- 209) A request for a groundwater protection waiver must be approved by the AER prior to beginning any work.

6 Confirming Location of Cement Plugs

6.1 Methods for Confirming Plug Locations

There are four AER-approved methods for confirming the location of plugs. Method 1 is the preferred method. If methods 2, 3, or 4 are used, care must be taken to ensure that the cement plug is not “strung out.”

Method 1 – Confirmation of Plug Location with Drill Pipe

This method uses a strap tally—measuring and counting joints of drill pipe—and subsequent tally adjustments to determine the drill pipe setting depth for each plug and the location of the plug top.

- 210) The location of the plug top must not be confirmed until after 8 hours from the time the plug was run or after surface samples have set.
- 211) The minimum force with which plugs must be located is 1800 decanewtons or string weight, whichever is less.

Note that the use of slick line or wireline is *not* an approved plug top locating method.

- 212) The licensee must include the following details in the tour report:
- a) cement type, mass (tonnes), and slurry volume (in cubic metres) for each plug,
 - b) drill pipe, tubing, or coil tubing setting depth (strap tally and tally adjustments must be shown on the tour reports to support the reported pipe/tubing setting depth),
 - c) force (in decanewtons) with which the plug top was felt,
 - d) plug top depth (strap tally and tally adjustments must be included to support the reported plug top location), and
 - e) date and time that the location of each plug was confirmed.

Method 2 – Direct Density Plug Logging

This method uses a radioactive source and a detector run on wireline.

- 213) Tool calibration must be performed at least once per job. The resulting log must show fluid density, fluid gradient, or cement percentage.
- 214) The difference between the cement density and the density of the drilling fluid must be at least 300 kilograms per cubic metre (kg/m^3) (or 2.9 kPa/m).
- 215) A minimum of 25 m of plug must be logged to accurately determine the plug top. The position of the plug top is interpreted as a suitable intermediate point between drilling fluid and cement slurry density, commonly 1600 kg/m^3 (or 15.7 kPa/m).
- 216) A plug log must be produced for this method and must be submitted to the AER in accordance with *Directive 080*. A calibration time and results must be included on the log.

Method 3 – Hydrostatic Pressure Plug Logging

This method uses a pressure transducer run on wireline. As the tool travels, the difference between pressure readings produces a fluid gradient, which may then be converted to fluid density.

- 217) The tool must be run continuously and must be calibrated in accordance with section 11.110 of the *Oil and Gas Conservation Rules*. The resulting log must show fluid density, fluid gradient, or cement percentage.
- 218) The difference between the cement density and the density of the drilling fluid must be at least 300 kg/m^3 (or 2.9 kPa/m).
- 219) A minimum of 25 m of plug must be logged to accurately determine the plug top. The position of the plug top is interpreted as a suitable intermediate point between drilling fluid and cement slurry density, commonly 1600 kg/m^3 (or 15.7 kPa/m).
- 220) A plug log must be produced for this method and must be submitted to the AER Information Management Branch (Well Logs). The serial number, range, and date of last calibration of the gauges must be shown on the plug log.

Method 4 – Radioactive Tracer Logging

This method uses a radioactive tracer introduced into the lead slurry. The location of the plug top is confirmed by detection of the tracer with a gamma ray logging tool. Since the radioactive logging method is locating the radioactive tracer, adequate precautions should be taken to properly mix the tracer with the cement to prevent channelling of the cement during pumping and displacement. The AER recommends that spacer fluid be used before the cement to prevent channelling.

- 221) The resulting log must show the location of the tracer, which is then interpreted as the plug top.
- 222) A plug log must be produced for this method and must be submitted to the AER Information Management Branch (Well Logs).

6.2 Plug Log Submission Requirements

- 223) Plug logs generated for methods 2, 3, and 4 must be submitted within 30 days of completing downhole abandonment operations.
- 224) The licensee must ensure that all of the following reporting requirements for open-hole abandonments are met. Although some of the information required is obtained from third parties on the well site (e.g., the slurry volume), the licensee must ensure that the information is accurate.
- 225) The requirements for plug logs are as follows:
 - a) A gamma ray or other type of suitable log that can be correlated to the open-hole log suite must be run for depth-control purposes.
 - b) The base gamma ray log must be traced onto the plug log and depth corrections made as necessary, or the licensee must include remarks on the plug log for all gamma ray deflections that were visually correlated, as well as any depth corrections made.
- 226) A collar locator must be run in conjunction with tally adjustments to determine the drill pipe setting depth for each plug. In the absence of a collar locator, strap tally and tally adjustments must be used.
- 227) The drill pipe must be pulled above the top of the plug prior to confirming its location with a logging tool.
- 228) If the plug logging method fails to clearly indicate the plug top, the licensee must confirm the location of the plug top with drill pipe according to method 1.
- 229) The licensee must submit the following information with the plug log:
 - a) mud density and bit size,
 - b) interval to be cemented,
 - c) drill pipe setting depth (strap tally and adjustments used in conjunction with the collar locator must be included to support the drill pipe setting depth),
 - d) mass in tonnes and volume in cubic metres of cement that was run during placement of the plug (this includes the calculated volume plus any excess run),
 - e) type/class of cement used, including any additives and the average slurry density,

- f) volume of displacement fluid used,
- g) plug placement time and logging time,
- h) interval logged,
- i) depth at which the cement top was logged,
- j) quality of cement samples (this is a visual analysis usually conducted by the cementing company; the analysis consists of time required for samples to set at surface), and
- k) a trace of the base correlation log shown on the plug log or remarks for all gamma ray deflections that were visually correlated and any depth corrections made.

7 Testing and Inspection Requirements

230) Before beginning any surface abandonment operation, the licensee must perform certain required tests on the well, as detailed below.

It is advisable to perform the gas migration and surface casing vent flow tests prior to beginning downhole abandonment operations to avoid having to re-enter the well to correct a wellbore problem. If testing indicates the presence of gas migration (GM), a surface casing vent flow (SCVF) or a leaking plugs, the source of the leak must be identified and repaired prior to surface abandonment.

7.1 Gas Migration Testing for Open- and Cased-Hole Wells

7.1.1 Gas Migration Test Area

231) GM testing must be conducted on

- a) cased-hole well abandonments where the well does not have a surface casing vent assembly, and
- b) all wells that are located in the required test area (see figure 6).

The required test areas are

- Townships 45–52, Ranges 1–9, W4M, and
- Townships 53–62, Ranges 4–17, W4M.

To reduce the chance of re-entering a well for repair, the AER recommends that all wells be tested for GM prior to abandonment. See appendix 3 of *Directive 087* for suggested procedures of GM testing.

7.1.2 Notification of Gas Migration

- 232) If a GM problem is detected, the licensee must notify the AER through the designated information submission system within 30 days of detection. See *Directive 087* for definitions of serious and non-serious GM.
- 233) If GM is discovered *after* surface abandonment has been completed on a well, the licensee must notify the AER through the designated information submission system within 30 days of detection.
- 234) The licensee is required to repair the GM and must obtain a nonroutine abandonment approval prior to re-entering and reabandoning the well.

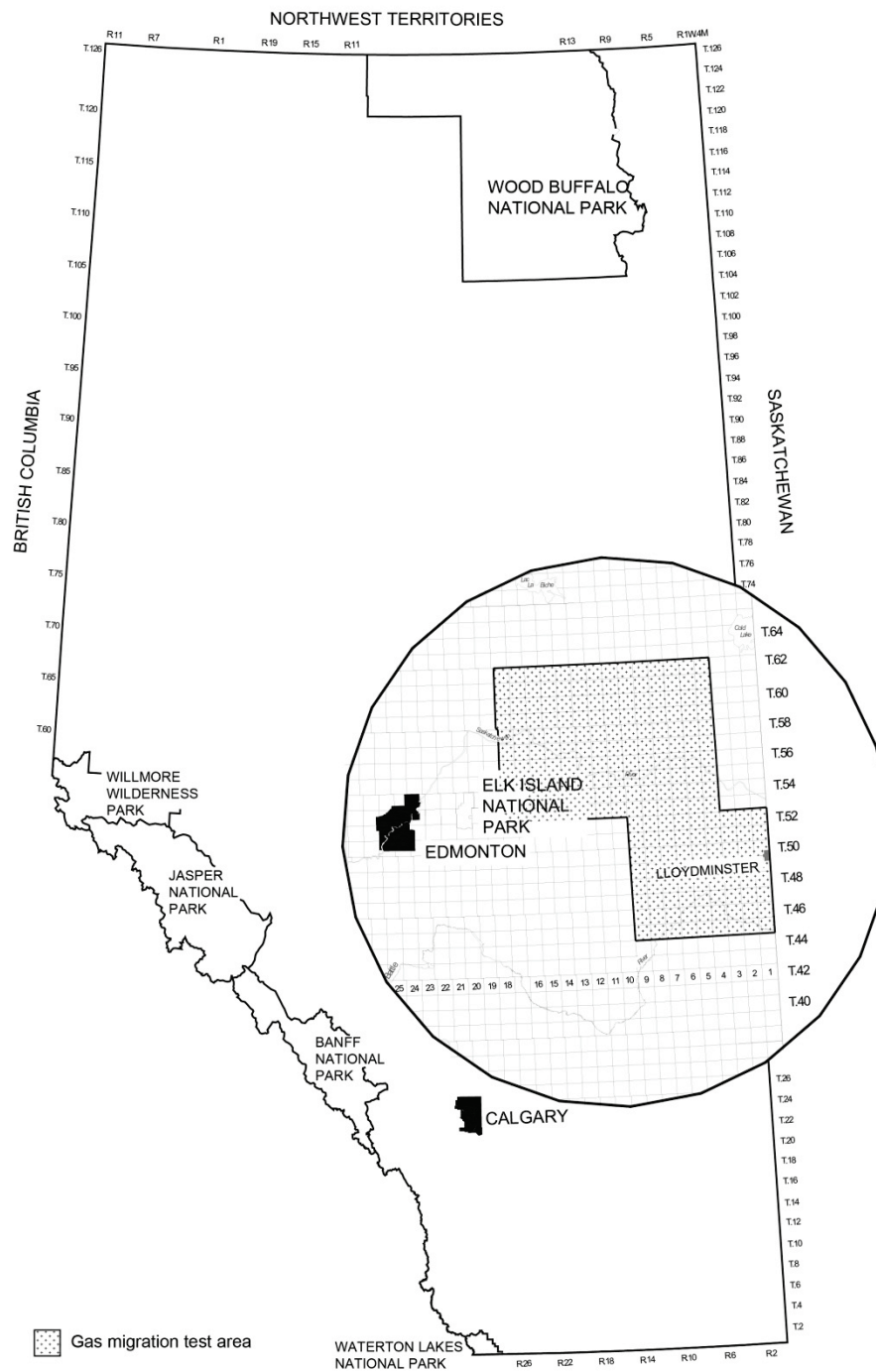


Figure 6. Gas migration test area

7.2 Fluid Level Test for Open-Hole Wells

- 235) Prior to conducting a surface abandonment, the licensee must conduct a **fluid level test** to determine if there are any leaking plugs.
- a) The fluid level test must be performed a minimum of 5 days after downhole abandonment operations have been completed.
 - b) To perform the test, the licensee must visually inspect the well to ensure that the fluid level inside the casing is static and there are no gas bubbles present.
- 236) In the event of a leaking plug, the licensee must prepare a reabandonment program and submit a nonroutine abandonment request via the designated information submission system within 30 days of discovery of the leaking plug.

Fluid level testing is not required for oil sands evaluation and test-hole wells where the fluid required to fill the hole coincided with the calculated pipe displacement volume (see section 4.6).

- 237) If a well is in the designated site inspection region (figure 7), the licensee must wait until the well passes an AER site inspection before cutting and capping the well. To schedule a site inspection, the licensee must contact the Medicine Hat Field Centre at 403-527-3385 within 24 hours after conducting downhole abandonment operations. The licensee must provide the well location, company contact name, and phone number.

The site inspection region includes

- Townships 7–14, Ranges 12–17, W4M, and
- Townships 15–18, Ranges 10–13, W4M.

- 238) Until the well has been inspected, the surface casing must be left open, with fluid visible, and protected from freezing. The well will be visually inspected by AER staff for leaking plugs and the results communicated to the licensee.

7.3 Surface Casing Vent Flow Test for Cased-Hole Wells

- 239) Prior to conducting a surface abandonment, the licensee must conduct a surface casing vent flow test to determine if gas, liquid, or any combination of substances is escaping from the casing vent assembly.
- 240) A bubble test must be conducted with a hose 2.5 cm below the water surface for a minimum of 10 minutes. If any bubbles are present during the 10-minute test, the well has a vent flow.

See appendix 2 of *Directive 087* for suggested procedures of SCVF testing.

7.3.1 Rate Determination

If bubbles were present during the bubble test, a SCVF rate test must be conducted. This test should be continued until a stabilized rate is obtained.

- 241) The licensee must use either a positive displacement gas metre or an orifice well tester to measure vented gas volumes.

7.3.2 Determination of Stabilized Shut-in Surface Casing Pressure

- 242) If bubbles were present during the bubble test, the SCV must be shut in until a stabilized pressure is obtained. The pressure is considered stabilized if the change in pressure is less than 2 kPa/hr over a six-hour period.

7.3.3 Determination of Serious or Non-Serious Vent Flow

- 243) The licensee must determine if the vent flow is serious or non-serious in accordance with the criteria set out in *Directive 087*.

7.3.4 Notification of SCVF

- 244) Where an SCVF test (such as a bubble test) indicates that a leak may be present, and a vent flow is confirmed, the licensee must notify the AER via the designated information submission system within 30 days of detection and repair in accordance with *Directive 087*.

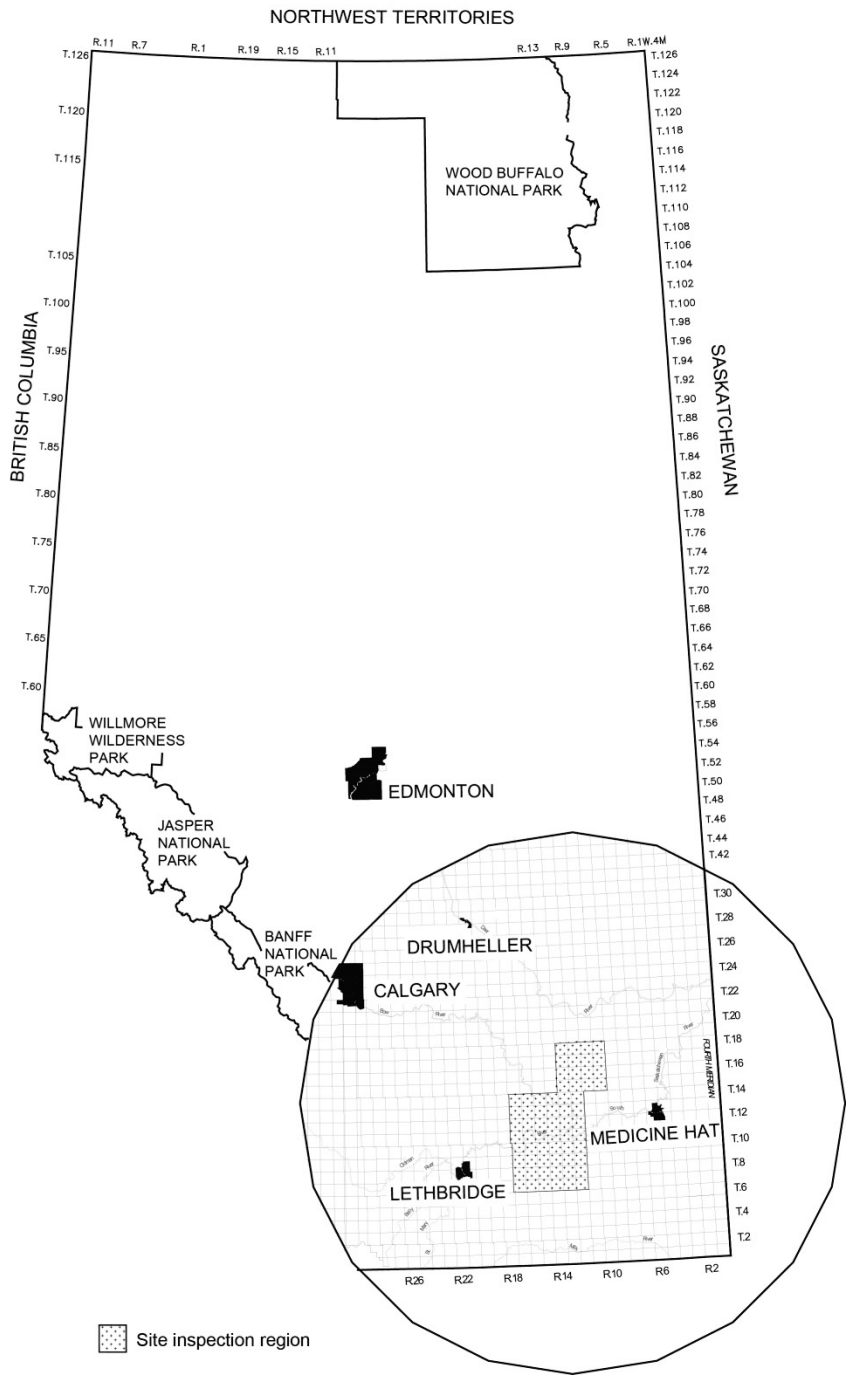


Figure 7. Site inspection region

8 Surface Abandonment

Surface abandonment is the cutting off of casing strings and the capping of a well.

- 245) The licensee must not begin surface abandonment until the required testing (see section 7) has been performed and the test results indicate the absence of any wellbore problem.
- 246) Surface abandonment must be completed within 12 months after downhole abandonment operations.
- 247) If the well is being abandoned due to an order of the AER, the licensee must begin surface abandonment as directed.
- 248) The licensee must inform all affected parties, including the landowner and occupant, of a planned surface abandonment before beginning any work.
- 249) Surface abandonment must be reported through the designated information submission system within 30 days of completing the operation.
- 250) Surface equipment, cement pads, debris, and produced liquids associated with the well licence must be removed within 12 months of the cutting and capping operation.
- 251) The licensee must retain the record of the removal and cleanup activities and make this available to the AER upon request.

8.1 Cutting and Capping

- 252) The casing strings must be cut off a minimum of 1 m below the final contour elevation, with the following exceptions:
- 253) If the well is in an area with special farming practices, such as deep tillage, drainage works, or peat lands, or is within 15 km of an urban development, the casing strings must be cut off a minimum of 2 m below final contour elevation.
- 254) If the well is located in an area where surface mining will be conducted,
 - a) a cement plug must be circulated from the uppermost abandonment plug to 15 m below the intended strip mining depth, and
 - b) above the strip mining depth, the casing must be cut at intervals agreed upon by the mining operator.
- 255) Surface, intermediate, and production casing strings must be capped at surface with a steel plate that is fastened and installed in a manner as to prevent any potential for pressure to build up within the casings while restricting access to the casing strings at surface.

Note that the “wedding cake” style cut and cap is now permitted.

- 256) The licensee must retain the record of the capping and venting procedure used in the well file for the life of the well. The documentation must be made available to the AER upon request. Typical cased-hole abandonment schematics are shown in figures 8 and 9.

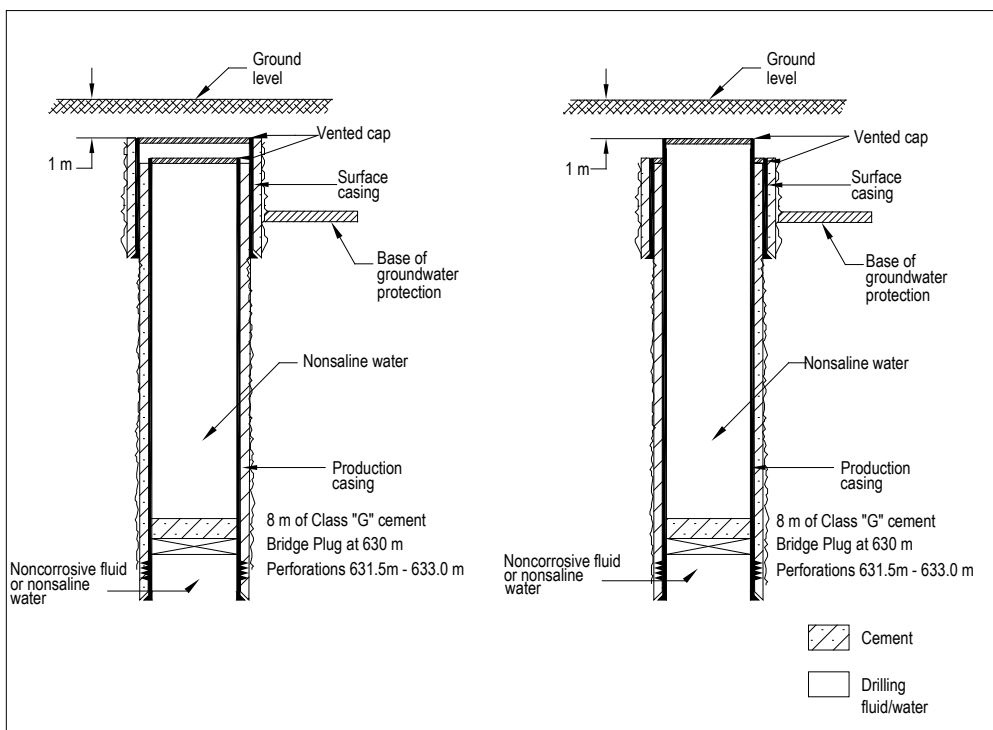


Figure 8. Examples of cased-hole abandonment for non-level-A intervals

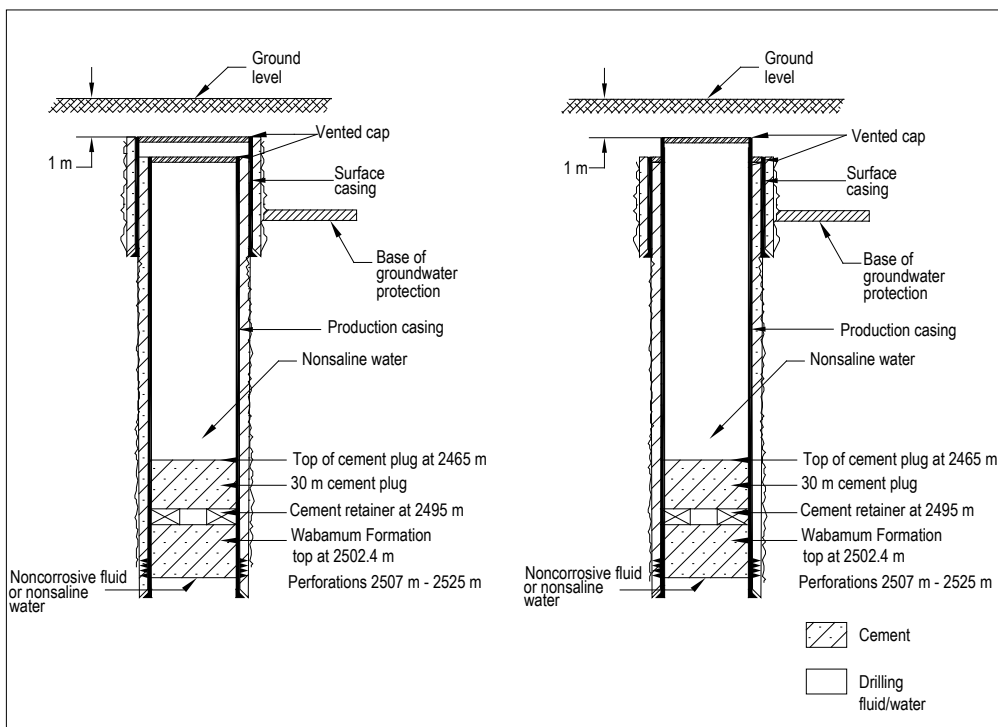


Figure 9. Examples of cased-hole abandonment for level-A intervals

Appendix 1 Definitions for the Purposes of *Directive 020*

| | |
|--|--|
| cased-hole well abandonment | The downhole abandonment of a completed or cased well. |
| in situ coal gasification/liquification | The intentional thermal or chemical conversion of coal into synthetic coal gas or liquid in an underground seam. |
| level-A interval | For the purpose of this directive, level-A intervals are intervals that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have been used for disposal of 1a or 1b fluids, • have been used for injection of acid gas, • have an H₂S concentration in excess of 15 per cent, or • have been designated as critical sour. <p>This evaluation is done on a well (not a pool) basis.</p> |
| Mannville Group equivalent | The comparable geological formation to the Mannville, such as the Luscar or Blairmore Groups or Spirit River Formation. |
| noncompleted well | A well that has not been perforated and has no open-hole section. |
| nonsaline water | Water that has total dissolved solids less than or equal to 4000 milligrams per litre. |
| open-hole well abandonment | The downhole abandonment of an open-hole well after drilling is complete but before the rig is released. |
| plug back | The downhole abandonment of a portion of an open-hole well. |
| porous zone | A zone that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has carbonates with effective porosity greater than 1 per cent, • has sandstones with effective porosity greater than 3 per cent, • has offset production, regardless of the porosity, or • has drillstem test formation fluid recoveries greater than 300 linear metres or gas volumes greater than 300 cubic metres. |
| protected interval | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any lithology with greater than 3 per cent porosity. • Any coal seam. |
| remedial cementing | Cementing operations performed to repair primary-cementing problems or to treat conditions arising after the wellbore has been constructed. |
| surface abandonment | The cutting off of casing strings and the capping of a well. |

| | |
|---|--|
| thermal cement | A cement blend that after curing for 48 hours has a minimum compressive strength of 3500 kPa at a temperature of 360°C. |
| “wedding cake” style cut and cap | A method of capping a well that has the production casing string extending beyond the intermediate or surface casing. If the well has intermediate casing, the intermediate casing would extend beyond the surface casing. All the casing strings are capped in a manner that will prevent the buildup of pressure inside any of the casing strings. |
| zonal abandonment | The abandonment of a single pool completion within a cased hole or the downhole abandonment of an open-hole interval in a cased hole. |