

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BRINE WELL IN CARLSBAD, NEW MEXICO

1. Question: What is a brine well?

Answer: It is a well that is drilled into a salt layer, into which fresh water is injected to create salt water (brine) needed for oil and gas operations. The fresh water dissolves out the salt creating a cavern under the ground.

2. Question: Why did the Loco Hills and the Artesia brine wells collapse?

Answer: Because the underground salt was dissolved leaving no support for the ground above it.

3. Question: Why is the I&W Brine well a concern?

Answer: The location and the potential size of the cavern. The other wells were in unpopulated rural areas, but this well is located within a populated area near buildings and facilities. Also, the proximity to the unlined Carlsbad Irrigation District canal adds a dimension of uncertainty and potential problems.

4. Question: How old is the I&W brine well?

Answer: It has been in service for approximately 30 years.

5. Question: What is the Oil Conservation Division Plan for the I&W brine well?

Answer: First to secure the site and to eliminate the truck traffic. Second we will install instruments to provide the county emergency personnel notice if any movement begins. Third, we will attempt to develop the information necessary to create a long term plan for dealing with the site.

6. Question: What rules and regulations does the Oil Conservation Division have in place concerning brine wells?

Answer: Right now, the rules are generally directed at protecting ground water quality during the injection process. OCD is completing a study on brine wells and will be submitting a report to the Secretary with recommendations on regulating these wells in the future.

7. Question: What rules need to change to prevent future brine well collapses?

Answer: The study will address this, but we already know we should not be locating these wells in populated areas; we need to target deeper salts and to modify construction and operations practices.

8. Question: What will happen if the I&W brine well collapses?

Answer: It depends on the mode of failure. It could be anything from slow ground subsidence to a large sinkhole as occurred at the Artesia location.

9. Question: How will citizens be notified?

Answer: Eddy County Emergency Management is in the process of finalizing their plan.

10. Question: What should I do if I live near the I&W brine well site?

Answer: All of the professionals who have evaluated the data agree there is a risk.

11. Question: What will happen to my property if I live near the brine well and it collapses?

Answer: Damage to your property could be general ground subsidence and cracks in the ground.

12. Question: Who will bear the financial responsibility if my home falls into a brine well hole?

Answer: That is for the courts to determine.

13. Question: How does the I&W brine well compare in size to the Loco Hills and Artesia brine well that collapsed?

Answer: They are comparable in age, depth and size.

14. Question: What risk is to the Carlsbad Irrigation District canal?

Answer: The proximity of the Carlsbad Irrigation District canal places it at risk for damage.

15. Question: What are risks of US-HWY 62 and US-HWY-285?

Answer: The proximity of these roads places them at risk for damage.

16. Question: What is the likelihood that the I&W Brine well will collapse?

Answer: There is a possibility that it could collapse. Out of the five wells that are of comparable depth to salt, two have collapsed in the last year.