

**STATE OF NEW MEXICO
ENERGY, MINERALS, AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OIL CONSERVATION DIVISION**

**IN THE MATTER OF THE HEARING
CALLED BY THE OIL CONSERVATION
COMMISSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF
CONSIDERING:**

*Case No. 12119
Order No. R-11231*

**APPLICATION OF OIL CONSERVATION DIVISION TO AMEND DIVISION
RULE 104 (19 NMAC 15.C.104) PERTAINING TO WELL SPACING.**

ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

BY THE COMMISSION:

This case came on for hearing at 9 o'clock a.m. on August 12, 1999, at Santa Fe, New Mexico, before the Oil Conservation Commission of New Mexico, hereinafter referred to as the "Commission."

NOW, on this 12th day of August, 1999, the Commission, a quorum being present, having considered the record,

FINDS THAT:

(1) Due public notice has been given and the Commission has jurisdiction of this case and its subject matter.

(2) Evidence presented indicated developments in 3-D technology and the increasing need of operators to drill/exploit smaller and smaller reservoirs has resulted in the need for an expansion of allowable areas in which to drill.

(3) The evidence indicated that Division Rule 104 is in need of amendment to relax the external and internal well setback requirements to allow operators greater latitude in locating wells so that additional oil and gas reserves can be accessed, thereby preventing waste.

(4) Evidence also indicated that allowing an optional infill well on a 320-acre unit will substantially improve gas recovery by allowing operators to locate wells at more optimum locations, thereby preventing waste.

(5) Using statewide 660-setbacks to any quarter section line for both 160 and 320 acre spacing provides operators a uniform setback for their well location decisions. This will also eliminate the "standup/laydown" orientation decision sometimes encountered when locating wells, which can pose a problem for operators and result in unnecessary gamesmanship. Since 660 feet is already allowed in cases where the side boundary of a 320-acre unit is the relevant boundary, changing the end boundary setback from 1650 feet to 660 feet should not, in effect, result in any increase in the impairment of correlative rights and will eliminate the 320-acre unit orientation decision.

(6) The relaxed internal setbacks will also aid in the recovery of additional oil and gas reserves, thereby preventing waste, but will still require compliance with any rule for a formation different than the primary targeted formation.

(7) The relaxed setback and infill requirements should not impair the correlative rights of offset operators since evidence indicated that the drainage areas of gas wells seldom exceed 160 acres.

(8) Notice of intent to drill an infill well to offset operators and or interest owners in the unit is not necessary since the rule change allows such a well. There thus would be no basis for objecting to the well.

(9) Opportunity is available to adopt or amend special pool orders to limit the number of wells per unit and/or require different setbacks to prevent waste and/or protect correlative rights. The Division's notice provisions in Rule 1207.A(4) for amending special pool orders was recently amended to facilitate such changes. Therefor, if an interest owner believes that the drainage areas for wells in a particular pool justify different well densities and/or setbacks, an action can be brought to institute such provisions.

(10) Actions can be brought before the Division to amend special pool orders and/or other orders to take into account any of the changes made to Rule 104 by this order.

(11) Compulsory pooling orders do not directly address the issue of subsequent wells on a unit. This is a separate issue being addressed by the Division.

(12) Notice of administrative applications for and opportunity for objecting to (i) non-standard proration units---104.D(2)(d), (ii) unorthodox locations---104.F(4), and (iii) pooling and communitization of small oil lots---104.I(1)(b) should be given to affected parties as defined in 1207.A(2).

(13) Due to the extensive changes being made to Rule 104, Rule 104 should be reformatted and rearranged. The language in Rule 104 should also be cleaned up and clarified.

(14) It is necessary to adopt Rule 104 as amended and set forth in the attached Exhibit "A".

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED

(1) Division Rule 104 is hereby amended and adopted as set forth in the attached Exhibit "A".

(2) Rule 104 shall be effective as of the date of its publication in the New Mexico Register.


(3) Jurisdiction of this case is retained for the entry of such further orders as the Commission may deem necessary.

(4) Done at Santa Fe, New Mexico, on the day and year hereinabove designated.

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
OIL CONSERVATION COMMISSION



JAMI BAILEY, Member



ROBERT L. LEE, Member



LORI WROTENBERY, Chairman



S E A L

EXHIBIT "A"
CASE NO. 12119
ORDER NO. R-11231

104 WELL SPACING AND LOCATION

104.A. CLASSIFICATION OF WELLS: WILDCAT AND DEVELOPMENT WELLS

(1) WILDCAT WELL

- (a) In San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, and McKinley Counties a wildcat well is any well to be drilled the spacing unit of which is a distance of two miles or more from:
 - (i) the outer boundary of any defined pool that has produced oil or gas from the formation to which the well is projected to be drilled; and
 - (ii) any well that has produced oil or gas from the formation to which the proposed well is projected to be drilled.
- (b) In all counties except San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, and McKinley, a wildcat well is any well to be drilled the spacing unit of which is a distance of one mile or more from:
 - (i) the outer boundary of any defined pool that has produced oil or gas from the formation to which the well is projected to be drilled; and
 - (ii) any well that has produced oil or gas from the formation to which the proposed well is projected.

(2) DEVELOPMENT WELL

- (a) Any well that is not a wildcat well shall be classified as a development well for the nearest pool that has produced oil or gas from the formation to which the well is projected to be drilled. Such development well shall be spaced, drilled, operated, and produced in accordance with the rules in effect for that pool, provided the well is completed in that pool.

- (b) Any well classified as a development well for a pool but completed in a producing formation not included in the vertical limits of that pool shall be operated and produced in accordance with the rules in effect for the nearest pool that is producing from that formation within the two miles in San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, and McKinley Counties or within one mile everywhere else. If there is no designated pool for that producing formation within the two miles in San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, and McKinley Counties or within one mile everywhere else, the well shall be re-classified as a wildcat well.

104.B. OIL WELL ACREAGE AND WELL LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

(1) Any wildcat well that is projected to be drilled as an oil well to a formation and in an area that in the opinion of the Division may reasonably be presumed to be productive of oil rather than gas and each development well for a defined oil pool, unless otherwise provided in special pool orders, shall be located on a spacing unit consisting of approximately 40 contiguous surface acres substantially in the form of a square which is a legal subdivision of the U.S. Public Land Surveys, which is a governmental quarter-quarter section or lot, and shall be located no closer than 330 feet to any boundary of such unit. Only those 40-acre spacing units committed to active secondary recovery projects shall be permitted more than four wells.

(2) If a well drilled as an oil well is completed as a gas well but does not conform to the applicable gas well location rules, the operator must apply for administrative approval for a non-standard location before the well can produce. The Director may set any such application for hearing.

104.C. GAS WELLS ACREAGE AND WELL LOCATION REQUIREMENTS

Any wildcat well that is projected to be drilled as a gas well to a formation and in an area that in the opinion of the Division may reasonably be presumed to be productive of gas rather than oil and each development well for a defined gas pool, unless otherwise provided in special pool orders, shall be spaced and located as follows:

(1) 640-ACRE SPACING applies to any deep gas well in Rio Arriba, San Juan, Sandoval or McKinley County that is projected to be drilled to a gas producing formation older than the Dakota formation or is a development well within a gas pool created and defined by the Division after June 1, 1997 in a formation older than the Dakota formation, which formation or pool is located within the surface outcrop of the Pictured Cliffs formation (i.e., the San Juan Basin). Such well shall be located on a spacing unit consisting of 640 contiguous surface acres, more or less, substantially in the form of a square which is a section and legal subdivision of the U.S. Public Land Surveys and shall be located no closer than: 1200 feet to any outer boundary of the spacing unit, 130 feet to any quarter section line, and 10 feet to any quarter-quarter section line or subdivision inner boundary.

(2) 320-ACRE SPACING applies to any deep gas well in Lea, Chaves, Eddy or Roosevelt County, defined as a well that is projected to be drilled to a gas producing formation or is within a defined gas pool in the Wolfcamp or an older formation. Such well shall be located on a spacing unit consisting of 320 surface contiguous acres, more or less, comprising any two contiguous quarter sections of a single section that is a legal subdivision of the U.S. Public Land Surveys provided that:

- (a) the initial well on a 320-acre unit is located no closer than 660 feet to the outer boundary of the quarter section on which the well is located and no closer than 10 feet to any quarter-quarter section line or subdivision inner boundary;
- (b) only one infill well on a 320-acre unit shall be allowed provided that the well is located in the quarter section of the 320-acre unit not containing the initial well and is no closer than 660 feet to the outer boundary of the quarter section and no closer than 10 feet to any quarter-quarter section line or subdivision inner boundary; and
- (c) the Division-designated operator for the infill well is the same operator currently designated by the Division for the initial well.

(3) 160-ACRE SPACING applies to any other gas well not covered above. Such well shall be located in a spacing unit consisting of 160 surface contiguous acres, more or less, substantially in the form of a square which is a quarter section and a legal subdivision of the U.S. Public Land Surveys and shall be located no closer than 660 feet to any outer boundary of such unit and no closer than 10 feet to any quarter-quarter section or subdivision inner boundary.

104.D. ACREAGE ASSIGNMENT

(1) Well Tests and Classification. It is the responsibility of the operator of any wildcat or development gas well to which more than 40 acres has been dedicated to conduct a potential test within 30 days following completion of the well and to file the test with the Division within 10 days following completion of the test. (See Rule 401)

- (a) The date of completion for a gas well is the date of the conclusion of active completion work on the well.
- (b) If the Division determines that a well should not be classified as a gas well, the Division will reduce the acreage dedicated to the well to the standard acreage for an oil well.
- (c) Failure of the operator to file the test within the specified time will also subject the well to such acreage reduction.

(2) Non-Standard Spacing Units. Any well that does not have the required amount of acreage dedicated to it for the pool or formation in which it is completed may not be produced until a standard spacing unit for the well has been formed and dedicated or until a non-standard spacing unit has been approved.

- (a) Division District Offices have the authority to approve non-standard spacing units without notice when the unorthodox size or shape is necessitated by a variation in the legal subdivision of the U. S. Public Land Surveys and/or consists of an entire governmental section and the non-standard spacing unit is not less than 70% or more than 130% of a standard spacing unit. The operator must obtain Division approval of Division Form C-102 showing the proposed non-standard spacing unit and the acreage contained therein.
- (b) The Director may grant administrative approval to non-standard spacing units after notice and opportunity for hearing when an application has been filed and the unorthodox size or shape is necessitated by a variation in the legal subdivision of the U.S. Public Land Surveys or the following facts exist:
 - (i) the non-standard spacing unit consists of: (A) a single quarter-quarter section or lot or (B) quarter-quarter sections or lots joined by a common side; and
 - (ii) the non-standard spacing unit lies wholly within: a single quarter section if the well is completed in a pool or formation for which 40, 80, or 160 acres is the standard spacing unit size; a single half section if the well is completed in a pool or formation for which 320 acres is the standard spacing unit size; or a single section if the well is completed in a pool or formation for which 640 acres is the standard spacing unit size.
- (c) Applications for administrative approval of non-standard spacing units pursuant to D(2)(b) shall be submitted to the Division's Santa Fe Office and accompanied by: (i) a plat showing the spacing unit and an applicable standard spacing unit for that pool or formation, the proposed well dedications and all adjoining spacing units; (ii) a list of affected persons as defined in Rule 1207.A(2); and (iii) a statement discussing the reasons for the formation of the non-standard spacing unit.

- (d) The applicant shall submit a statement attesting that the applicant, on or before the date the application was submitted to the Division, sent notification to the affected persons by submitting a copy of the application, including a copy of the plat described in (c) above, by certified mail, return receipt requested, advising them that if they have an objection it must be filed in writing within 20 days from the date the Division receives the application. The Director may approve the application upon receipt of waivers from all the notified persons or if no person has filed an objection within the 20-day period.
- (e) The Director may set for hearing any application for administrative approval.

(3) Number of Wells Per Spacing Unit. Exceptions to the provisions of statewide rules or special pool orders concerning the number of wells allowed per spacing unit may be permitted by the Director only after notice and opportunity for hearing. Notice shall be given to those affected persons defined in Rule 1207.A.(2).

104.E. FORMS

Form C-102 "Well Location and Acreage Dedication Plat" for any well shall designate the exact legal subdivision dedicated to the well. Form C-101 "Application for Permit to Drill, Deepen, or Plug Back" will not be approved without an acreage designation on Form C-102.

104.F. UNORTHODOX LOCATIONS

(1) Well locations for producing wells and/or injection wells that are unorthodox based on the requirements of B above and are necessary for an efficient production and injection pattern within a secondary recovery, tertiary recovery, or pressure maintenance project are hereby authorized, provided that the unorthodox location within the project is no closer than the required minimum distance to the outer boundary of the lease or unitized area, and no closer than 10 feet to any quarter-quarter section line or subdivision inner boundary. These locations shall only require such prior approvals as are necessary for an unorthodox location.

(2) The Director may grant an exception to the well location requirements of B and C above or special pool orders after notice and opportunity for hearing when the exception is necessary to prevent waste or protect correlative rights.

(3) Applications for administrative approval pursuant to F(2) above shall be submitted to the Division's Santa Fe Office accompanied by (a) a plat showing the spacing unit, the proposed unorthodox well location and the adjoining spacing units and wells; (b) a list of affected persons as defined in Rule 1207.A(2); and (c) information evidencing the need for the exception. Notice shall be given as required in Rule 1207.A(2).

(4) The applicant shall submit a statement attesting that applicant, on or before the date that the application was submitted to the Division, sent notification to the affected persons by submitting a copy of the application, including a copy of the plat described in F(3) above, by certified mail, return receipt requested, advising them that if they have an objection it must be filed in writing within 20 days from the date the Division receives the application. The Director may approve the unorthodox location upon receipt of waivers from all the affected persons or if no affected person has filed an objection within the 20-day period.

(5) The Director may set for hearing any application for administrative approval of an unorthodox location.

(6) Whenever an unorthodox location is approved, the Division may order any action necessary to offset any advantage of the unorthodox location.

104.G. EFFECT ON ALLOWABLES

(1) If the drilling tract is within a prorated/allocated oil pool or is subsequently placed within such pool and the drilling tract consists of less than $39\frac{1}{2}$ acres or more than $40\frac{1}{2}$ acres, the top unit allowable for the well shall be increased or decreased in the proportion that the number of acres in the drilling tract bears to 40.

(2) If the drilling tract is within a prorated/allocated gas pool or is subsequently placed within such pool and the drilling tract consists of less than 158 acres or more than 162 acres in 160-acre pools, or less than 316 acres or more than 324 acres in 320-acre pools, or less than 632 acres or more than 648 acres in 640-acre pools, the top allowable for the well shall be decreased or increased in the proportion that the number of acres in the drilling tract bears to a standard spacing unit for the pool.

(3) In computing acreage under (1) and (2) above, less than $\frac{1}{2}$ acre shall not be counted but $\frac{1}{2}$ acre or more shall count as one acre.

(4) The provisions of (1) and (2) above shall apply only to wells completed after January 1, 1950.

104.H. DIVISION-INITATED EXCEPTIONS

In order to prevent waste, the Division may, after hearing, set different spacing requirements and require different acreage for drilling tracts in any defined oil or gas pool.

104.I. POOLING OR COMMUNITIZATION OF SMALL OIL LOTS

(1) The Division may approve the pooling or communitization of fractional oil lots of 20.49 acres or less with a contiguous oil spacing unit when the ownership is common and the tracts are part of the same lease with the same royalty interests if the following requirements are satisfied:

- (a) Applications for administrative approval shall be submitted to the Division's Santa Fe Office and accompanied by: (i) a plat showing the dimensions and acreage involved, the ownership of such acreage, the location of all existing and proposed wells and all adjoining spacing units; (ii) a list of affected persons as defined in Rule 1207.A(2); and (iii) a statement discussing the reasons for the pooling or communitization.
- (b) The applicant shall submit a statement attesting that the applicant, on or before the date the application was submitted to the Division, sent notification to the affected persons by submitting a copy of the application, including a copy of the plat described in (a) above, by certified mail, return receipt requested, advising them that if they have an objection it must be filed in writing within 20 days from the date the Division receives the application. The Director may approve the application upon receipt of waivers from all the notified persons or if no person has filed an objection within the 20-day period.
- (c) The Director may set for hearing any application for administrative approval.

(2) The Division may consider the common ownership and common lease requirements met if the applicant furnishes with the application a copy of an executed pooling agreement communitizing the tracts involved.

[1-1-50...2-1-96; A, 6-30-97; A, 8-31-99]