

§ 113-396. Wells to be kept under control.

In order to protect further the natural gas fields and oil fields in this State, it is hereby declared to be unlawful for any person to permit negligently any gas or oil well to go wild or to get out of control. The owner of any such well shall, after 24 hours' written notice by the Department given to him or to the person in possession of such well, make reasonable effort to control such well.

In the event of the failure of the owner of such well within 24 hours after service of the notice above provided for, to control the same, if such can be done within the period, or to begin in good faith upon service of such notice, operations to control such well, or upon failure to prosecute diligently such operations, then the Department shall have the right to take charge of the work of controlling such well, and it shall have the right to proceed, through its own agents or by contract with a responsible contractor, to control the well or otherwise to prevent the escape or loss of gas or oil from such well all at the reasonable expense of the owner of the well. In order to secure to the Department the payment of the reasonable cost and expense of controlling or plugging such well, the Department shall retain the possession of the same and shall be entitled to receive and retain the rents, revenues and income therefrom until the costs and expenses incurred by the Department shall be repaid. When all such costs and expenses have been repaid, the Department shall restore possession of such well to the owner; provided, that in the event the income received by the Department shall not be sufficient to reimburse the Department as provided for in this section, the Department shall have a lien or privilege upon all of the property of the owner of such well, except such as is exempt by law, and the Department shall proceed to enforce such lien or privilege by suit brought in any court of competent jurisdiction, the same as any other civil action, and the judgment so obtained shall be executed in the same manner now provided by law for execution of judgments. Any excess over the amount due the Department which the property seized and sold may bring, after payment of court costs, shall be paid over to the owner of such well. (1945, c. 702, s. 16; 1973, c. 1262, s. 86.)