

**SAFETY ALERT - #52-2005**  
**ABANDONED DRILLING LEASE – OPEN HOLE**  
**RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 2005**

<b>Function:</b> Exploration	<b>Incident Date:</b> August 19, 2005
<b>Location:</b> Onshore	<b>Location Detail:</b> Wellsite
<b>Incident Type:</b> Near miss	<b>Country and Region:</b> Canada, NW Alberta

**Note:** On September 20, 2005, the Petroleum Industry Training Service (PITS) and the Canadian Petroleum Safety Council (CPSC) combined their operations to become *Enform*.

**Description of Incident:**

A recording line helper was laying out recording equipment across an abandoned wellsite when he walked into an area that appeared to be surface water and mud from recent rainfall. He began sinking in the mud, and the more he tried to get out, the deeper he sank. It took two other workers and the use of a seismic cable to get him out of a hole that was similar to "quick sand."

**Causes:**

Upon further investigation, it was determined that there was an open excavation around the abandoned hole, and it had filled with mud and water. It was also discovered that there were several other abandoned leases in the area with open holes (see Figure 1 and 2). It is believed that these are drilling "ratholes." During drilling operations, the kelly is placed in the rathole when hoisting operations are in progress.

**Photos:**



**Recommendations:**

1. Consult with the Canadian Association of Geophysical Contractors (CAGC) to obtain help with this issue as there does not appear to be any specific regulation regarding how drilling companies and lease owners are required to safely abandon ratholes on a lease site.
2. All field managers should discuss this incident with field employees and contractors to ensure that all operations phases are aware of the potential for this kind of incident.
3. Any worksite with existing wellsites will require a specific hazard assessment to determine the potential for this type of condition.

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**Post-Incident Note from Enform:**

This incident is not unique or new to our industry. As early as 1990, both the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) and Alberta Occupational Health & Safety expressed concerns about hazards posed by open ratholes before and after drilling operations in Informational Letter 90-18 ([www.eub.gov.ab.ca/BBS/requirements/ils/ils/il90-18.htm](http://www.eub.gov.ab.ca/BBS/requirements/ils/ils/il90-18.htm)). This document asks both operators and contractors to ensure open rathole hazards are dealt with.

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**DISCLAIMER:**

This Safety Alert is designed to prevent similar incidents by communicating the information at the earliest possible opportunity. Accordingly, the information may change over time. It may be necessary to obtain updates from the source before relying upon the accuracy of the information contained herein. This material is presented for information purposes only. Managers and supervisors should evaluate this information to determine if it can be applied to their own situations and practices.