

PATCHWORKS

▶ HOW THE OIL PATCH WORKS

▶ Industry Recommended Practices

Regulations are important in the oil and gas industry because they ensure all companies adhere to the same level of strict standards for safety, environmental protection and other critical aspects of industry operations. Regulations also build public confidence in industry operations.

But regulations can take a long time to be finalized and implemented, particularly if multiple jurisdictions are involved. As new pieces of legislation are being created, the oil and gas industry continues to evolve and innovate, regularly developing and using new technologies and processes that allow companies to exceed existing or even proposed regulatory standards.

When that happens, the oil and gas industry isn't willing to coast along, just meeting standards that are lower than what they can reasonably attain. Instead, when there's a clear gap between regulations and best practices for a specific operation, the industry develops an Industry Recommended Practice or IRP.

IRPs are created by industry experts – the ones who know the industry the best. These people take time out of their busy jobs to collaborate on identifying and documenting the best practices known and tested in the industry. With this process, establishing new IRPs, or updating existing ones, can often be done relatively quickly.



Photos above and top right: [Enform](#)

IRPs help all companies comply with up-to-date practices and alleviate any discrepancies in legislation, such as differences in regulations across provinces.

Efficiency matters. The oil and gas industry is innovation-rich. The faster the best new innovations get into guidance documents such as IRPs, the safer, cleaner and more efficient the industry can and will be. Plus, every IRP is part of a five-year review cycle, to ensure it remains aligned with the latest in industry technologies and procedures

The first IRP (called an Alberta Recommended Practice at the time) was ARP #1: Critical Sour Well Drilling. It was created in 1987 in response to a blowout that



Photo: [Baker Hughes](#)

occurred near Lodgepole, Alberta in 1982. Since then, dozens of IRPs have been developed. Some of the most recent IRPs have been designed to establish best practices in emerging aspects of operations, such as [coiled tubing \(IRP #21\)](#), [underbalanced drilling \(IRP #22\)](#) and [fracture stimulation \(IRP #24\)](#).

Risk awareness and reduction is a huge part of the IRP development process. Once an IRP is developed and implemented, no one can ever say "I didn't know". That puts the accountability where it belongs, in the hands of the company and its workers.



[Enform](#), the upstream oil and gas industry's safety association, coordinates IRP development. Many of the industry's IRPs are developed by the [Drilling and Completions Committee \(DACC\)](#), in consultation with subject matter experts in specific fields.

PatchWorks explains how the oilpatch works in a series of short, monthly articles.

PatchWorks is part of PSAC's public outreach program, designed to strengthen the partnership between the oil and gas industry and the communities where we operate.

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