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# Disposal of drilling mud – facts on current media reporting

From the perspective of DEA Deutsche Erdoel AG, neither is there a disposal problem related to drilling mud pits nor is their content toxic waste. There is no discernible evidence at present of danger to the environment either.

## Conventional practice at DEA for mud pits until 1993

In the past, when spudding wells in accordance with state-of-the-art practice at the time and with the approval of the supervisory (mining) authority, drilling mud pits were dug in which rock cuttings and drilling mud were placed in storage. As a rule, the substances of drilling mud were clay, water and salt. They were used to stabilise wells and bringing the drilled rocks to the surface. When wells were drilled at DEA, from the early 1990s on, this material has been disposed of by transporting the drilling mud and rock cuttings for due and proper processing in appropriate facilities. So-called operating mud pits (also referred to as oil mud pits) also contain hydrocarbons. For this reason, the floors of these pits are sealed to prevent any seepage into the groundwater. Studies meanwhile conducted have thus far not yielded any indications that the groundwater is being contaminated. Since a multi-year monitoring programme has not shown any evidence at all of humankind and the environment being endangered, DEA and independent experts as well as the competent authorities assume that these pits are highly suitable for depositing the described substances and that there is no need for their clearance, transportation and land-filling elsewhere.

## DEA has made a proactive contribution to precise mapping

DEA has processed all records available within the company on mud pits and compiled all the relevant information in hand. What is the name of the pit? Where is it located? What substances does it contain? What volumes are involved? What are the geological characteristics below the pit? This compilation was handed over to the soil protection authorities of the various German federal states in 2010/2011 for their land register of legacy burdens. At the time, 203 mud pits were identified on which DEA had any knowledge (created and filled until 1993). In the five years since the report, no need for action vis-à-vis DEA has been called for by the relevant authorities in any federal state. Should the rural districts of Lower Saxony perceive the need for future action and commission any studies to be carried out, as part of an agreement between the German Association of Crude Oil and Natural Gas Producers (Wirtschaftsverband Erdöl- und Erdgasgewinnung – WEG) with the environmental ministry of Lower Saxony, DEA will assume 80 per cent of the costs involved.

## According to current findings, the mud pits do not give rise to any danger

With reference to the drilling mud pits, it can safely be assumed that until the early 1990s only clay, water and salt were used as drilling mud. However, from today's perspective the former operating mud pits do not indicate any danger either since they are sealed. The residual substances in storage are immobile, non-water-soluble, and many are biologically degradable. Today, most of the former mud pits are fully overgrown and frequently cannot be identified as such pits any longer. According all the data available to us, they do not give rise to any impairment of the residents' health nor to any environmental harm. Should there be any doubts regarding the safety of mud pits, DEA will be pleased to make the existing expertise available to carry out the relevant studies. Whether or not we can assume that environmental harm emanates from historic sites will be determined within the scope of an extensive study. We face up to our responsibility and provide financial support for these measures. See: <http://www.erdoel-erdgas.de/Themen/Klima-Umwelt/Untersuchung-historischer-Oel-und-Bohrschlammgruben>.

## Appropriate handling as well as due and proper disposal

Should – contrary to expectations – any of these studies produce evidence of any discharge of hazardous substances, DEA guarantees due and proper handling by means of the following measures. DEA faces up to its responsibility, and it goes without saying that DEA will make the funds available if, in specific cases, any remediation or safety measures should be necessary after all. Alternatively, it might be an option to consider additional safety measures to protect humankind, fauna & flora and the groundwater.

## Today's disposal practice

Today the need for land-filling in surface pits has been dispensed with. Drilling mud produced is appropriately recycled (e.g. by recycling the oil of the oil mud) or by companies certified to do so. Of course, a due and proper sustainable disposal concept also extends to include safe transportation. ([http://www.ngs-mbh.de/bin/pdfs/Fakten\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ngs-mbh.de/bin/pdfs/Fakten_2014.pdf))

## Further information

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