



OIL & GAS WASTE WATCH

Q3 2026 (July – Sept.)

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Oil & Gas Waste Watch: Q3 2026 (July 1 - Sept 30)

An Analysis of Industry Pollution and Regulatory Failures

“Oil and gas companies reported 29% more liquid spills than this time last year, and more than three-quarters occurred on public lands. These are persistent failures in an industry that produces enormous volumes of toxic waste. As companies push to expand produced-water treatment, reuse, and discharge, New Mexico should be strengthening pollution prevention and holding repeat polluters accountable, not opening new pathways for toxic waste to threaten our land and water.”

- Melissa Troutman, WildEarth Guardians Climate and Health Advocate / Lead Author

Executive Summary

In the third quarter of 2026 (July 1 - Sept 30), oil and gas companies reported **7,963 material spills across eleven counties** in New Mexico, an average of 87 spills per day.¹

New Mexico oil and gas companies reported **453 liquid spills** across three months in Q3 2026, a 29% increase compared with Q3 2025, a 23% increase over Q2 2026, and a 19% increase over Q1 2026. Although the total volume of liquid pollution declined from the previous quarter, the growing frequency of reported liquid spills points to persistent failures in waste handling and spill prevention. Meanwhile, reported gaseous spill volume increased despite a decline in the number of gaseous spill records.

Nearly 98% of total spills in Q3 occurred in Eddy and Lea counties in the Permian Basin, though liquid spills occurred across nine New Mexico counties. Reported liquids spilled included produced-water, crude oil, condensate, brine, chemicals, diesel, and “other” or “unknown materials.” According to operators, **1,601,490 gallons of liquid materials were spilled** in Q3 2026, of which 1,471,050 gallons

¹ New Mexico Oil Conservation Division Spill database queried for July 1, 2026 to September 30, 2026, accessed October 6, 2026. Data sorted to remove liquid units of volume and materials. OCD makes spills publicly available via two databases that distinguish between “spills” and “incidents.” A single incident may involve multiple materials and therefore generate more than one record. Reported materials include crude oil, diesel, carbon dioxide, natural gas, and produced-water. The OCD database does not identify every chemical constituent or independently measure every associated health impact. Each material released is a separate “spill” (e.g. “crude oil” and “diesel fuel”) within a single “incident” that occurred at a specific location and date (e.g. Well Pad XYZ on 7/4/26). For the purposes of this report and to avoid confusion, we use the term “spill” as used in common parlance to refer to individual materials spilled.

(92%) were produced-water, the industry's toxic fracking waste byproduct.² Of 608,968 gallons reported as unrecovered or “lost” to soil and waterways, 533,652 gallons (88%) were produced-water.

The largest liquid spill in the Q3 dataset was reported by Select Water Solutions, a produced-water management company. On [September 19, 2026](#), the company reported spilling 104,286 gallons of produced-water on federal public land near Carlsbad following a flowline failure; 90,426 gallons (87%) were reported lost to the surrounding environment.

Public lands continue to be the locus of most oil and gas spill pollution, accounting for 76% of the quarter's total liquid spills. Of the 453 liquid spills, 224 occurred on federal public lands and 122 on state trust lands, for a combined 346 releases. **Liquid spills on federal public lands increased 9%** compared to Q3 2025, rising from 206 to 224.

New Mexico's oil and gas industry continues to spill toxic waste at an alarming rate. In the first nine months of 2026 alone, operators reported **25,336 spills and releases and more than 6.1 million gallons of liquid pollution**, including 5.7 million gallons of produced-water. Of the nearly 2.2 million gallons of liquid waste reported unrecovered, **90% was produced-water**. Equipment and infrastructure failures remain recurring causes of these releases.

These findings expose the persistent costs of oil and gas extraction: toxic waste left unrecovered, public lands bearing the burden of pollution, and repeat spills that demand greater regulatory scrutiny. As the industry pushes to expand produced-water reuse and discharge, the risks of transporting, storing, and managing this hazardous waste demand greater attention. **Without stronger prevention requirements, meaningful enforcement, and full public disclosure, the industry will continue shifting the risks and costs of its waste onto New Mexico's communities, lands, and water.**

Quarterly Incident Summary (July 1 – September 30, 2026)

- ❖ **Total Spill Incidents Documented:** 7,963 total (7,510 gaseous spills / 453 liquid spills)
- ❖ **Worst Actors:** Devon Energy most liquid spills (83), EOG Resources most gaseous spills (1,272)



² Oil and gas extraction pumps enormous volumes of water underground, mixes it with sand and proprietary fracking chemicals under extreme pressure, and brings an even larger stream of toxic liquid waste back to the surface. Industry calls this fracking waste ‘produced water.’ We use produced-water to emphasize that it is an oilfield waste stream, not ordinary water. Produced-water is known to contain radioactive materials, heavy metals, hydrocarbons, salts, carcinogens, and hazardous or undisclosed chemicals, many poorly characterized for toxicity. In the Permian Basin, oil and gas extraction produces at least four barrels of produced-water for every barrel of oil.

❖ **Most Affected Lands:** State and federal public lands³

Landowner	# of liquid spills	Total Spilled	Total “lost”
Federal	224	691,110 gallons	253,386 gallons
State	122	536,256 gallons	200,760 gallons
Private	107	375,354 gallons	155,236 gallons

❖ **Most Affected Counties:**

- Lea County - 4,832 spills
- Eddy County - 2,943 spills
- Rio Arriba County - 97 spills
- San Juan County - 53 spills
- Chaves County - 31 spills
- Union County - 2 spills
- Sandoval County - 1 spill
- Roosevelt County - 1 spill
- Doña Ana County - 1 spill
- McKinley County - 1 spill
- Quay County - 1 spill

❖ **Total Volume Spilled:**

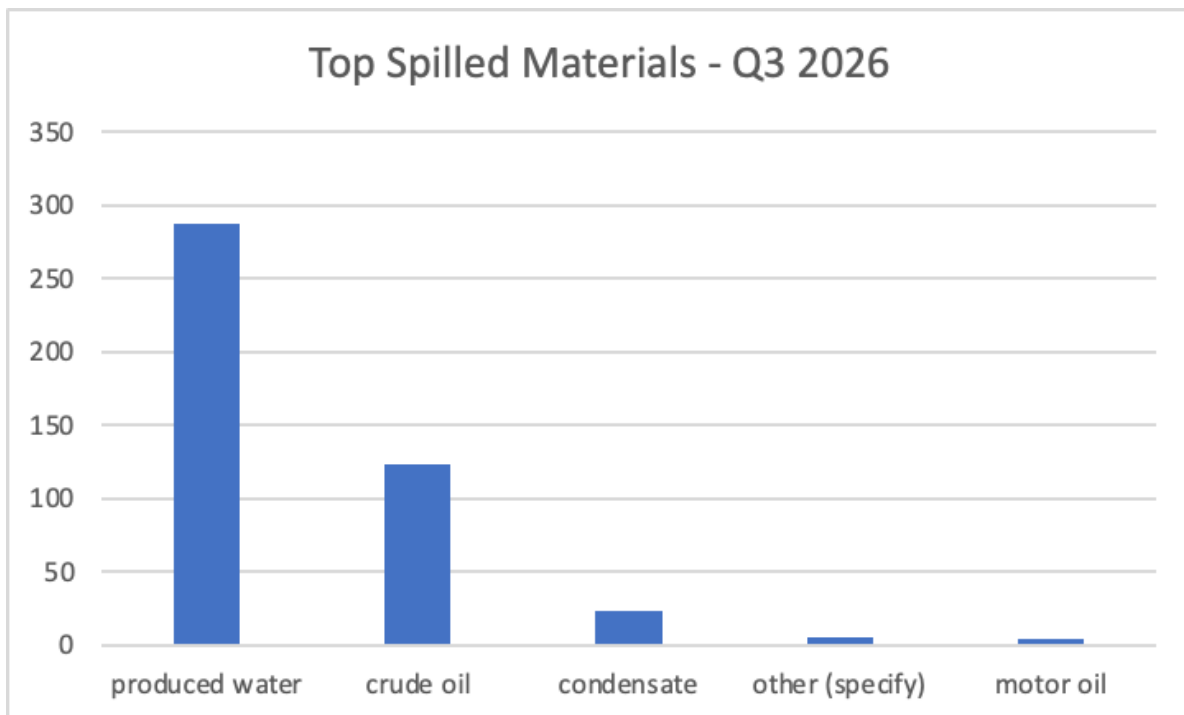
- 1,601,490 gallons of liquid spilled (38,131 barrels / 320 tanker trucks)⁴
- 608,968 gallons of liquid “lost” (14,497 barrels / 122 tanker trucks)

❖ **Total Volume “Produced Water” Spilled:**

- 1,471,050 gallons spilled (35,025 barrels / 294 tanker trucks)
- 533,652 gallons “lost” (12,706 barrels / 107 tanker trucks)

³ Only liquid spills designate a landowner in the summary dataset.

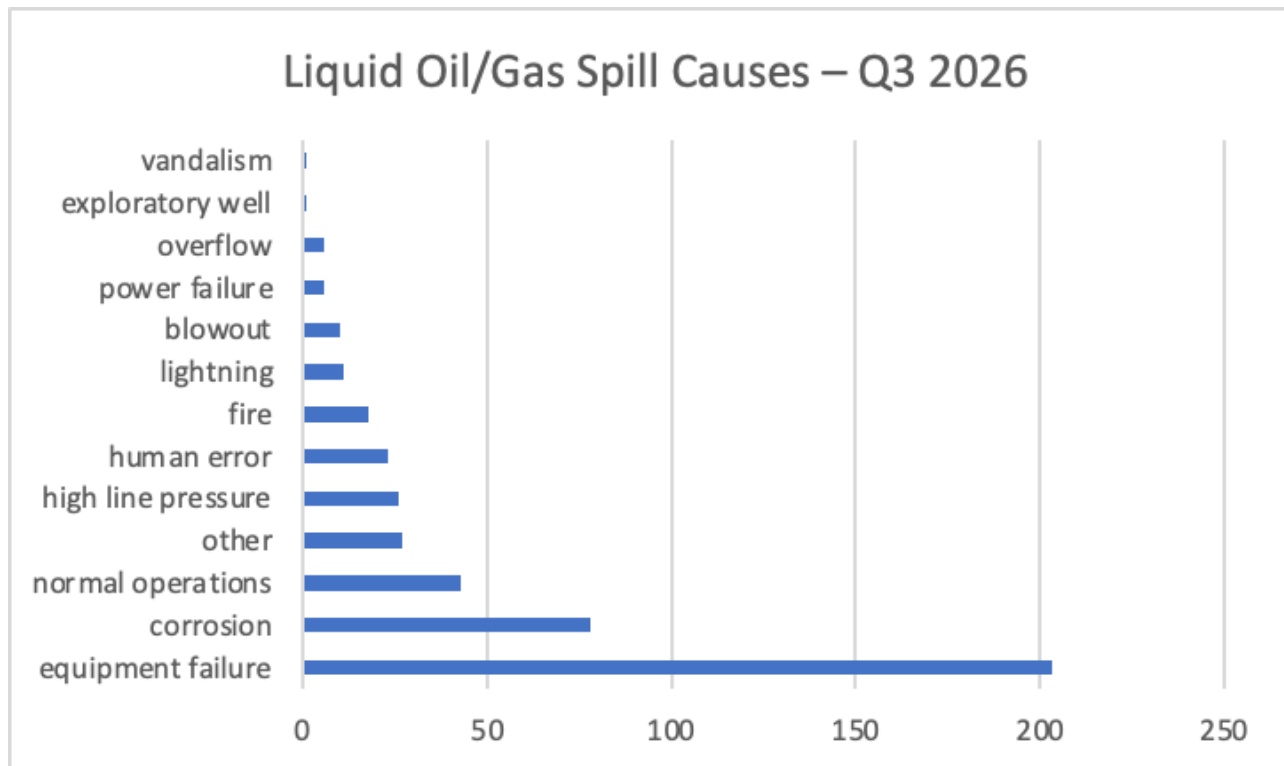
⁴ One barrel equals 42 U.S. gallons. Tanker-truck equivalents assume a standard oilfield water tanker capacity of approximately 5,000 gallons and are rounded to the nearest whole truck.



Material	# of Times Spilled ⁵	Total Volume Spilled (gallons)	Total Volume Lost (gallons)
Produced-water	287	1,471,050	533,652
Crude oil	123	86,058	43,890
Condensate	23	14,532	13,944
"Other"	5	2,520	1,302
Motor oil	4	240	10
Drilling mud/fluid	3	18,438	12,012
Chemical	2	4,200	0
"Unknown"	2	0	0
Brine water	1	3,360	3,360
Diesel	1	294	0
Lube oil	1	798	798
Natural gas liquids	1	0	0

⁵ Number of times spilled calculated using the Oil Conservation Division Spill Database, which separates spills by material. Therefore, the total number of spilled materials in this table exceeds the number of spill incidents, which are all spills that occur at the same time and place.

- ❖ **Primary Cause of Spills:** Equipment failures, corrosion, and “normal operations” are the top three reported causes of spills and releases this quarter. These recurring problems underscore the need for stronger inspection, maintenance, and pollution prevention requirements.



❖ **Primary Contaminants:**

- **#1 Produced Water** (287 spills) – “Produced water” is oil and gas waste that is known to contain toxic and carcinogenic materials, including heavy metals, radioactive materials, volatile organic compounds, in addition to a host of unknown chemicals that are not required to be disclosed to regulators or the public. In 2020, researchers found that “86% of produced water chemicals lack toxicity data to complete a risk assessment in the US.”⁶
- **#2 Other** (207 spills) – This category does not specify what materials were spilled. Therefore, the pollution impact is unknown.
- **#3 Crude Oil** (123 spills) – Petroleum contamination in soils includes hydrocarbons like carcinogenic benzene, toluene, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), nickel, arsenic and mercury, which seriously threaten environmental safety and human health.⁷

⁶ Cloelle Danforth, Weihsueh A. Chiu, Ivan Rusyn, Kim Schultz, Ashley Bolden, Carol Kwiatkowski, Elena Craft, An integrative method for identification and prioritization of constituents of concern in produced water from onshore oil and gas extraction, *Environment International*, Volume 134, 2020, 105280, ISSN 0160-4120, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2019.105280>.

⁷ Prabhakar Mishra, Neelakanta Sarvashiva Kiran, Luiz Fernando Romanholo Ferreira, Krishna Kumar Yadav, Sikandar I. Mulla, New insights into the bioremediation of petroleum contaminants: A systematic review, *Chemosphere*, Volume 326, 2023, 138391, ISSN 0045-6535, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2023.138391>.

❖ **Five Largest Liquid Spills in Q3:**

Company / Site	Date	Volume Spilled (gallons)	Volume Lost (gallons)	County	Material	Cause	Land Ownership
#1 Select Water Solutions / Flow Line	9/19/26	104,286	90,426	Eddy	Produced Water	Equipment Failure	Federal / Public
#2 Hilcorp / Geronimo 28 State Com	9/5/26	100,800	42	Eddy	Produced Water	Equipment Failure	State / Public
#3 Matador Production	9/10/26	77,700	27,174	Lea	Produced Water	Equipment Failure	State / Public
#4 Devon Energy / Stranger 34 CTB 1	9/4/26	54,726	0	Lea	Produced Water	Power Failure	Federal / Public
#5 Spur Energy Partners	9/7/26	50,190	0	Eddy	Produced Water	High Line Pressure	Private

❖ **Biggest Liquid Spill (by volume):**

- **Operator:** Select Water Solutions
- **Incident Number:** [nAPP2626364757](#)
- **Description:** Select Water Solutions, a waste management company, reported releasing 104,286 gallons (21 tanker trucks) of produced-water from a failed flowline near Carlsbad city limits on September 19, 2026. Of that total, 90,426 gallons, or 87%, were reported “lost” and unrecovered. The spill occurred on federal public land. As of October 23rd, no information about spill clean up and response had been provided on the state’s spill database.



Photo Credit: Alamogordo Town News, [Otero County family tie reported in deadly Lea County pipeline explosion](#)

Beyond the Spills: The Deadly Consequences of Oil and Gas Infrastructure Failures

The consequences of oil and gas infrastructure failures extend far beyond the volumes reported in state spill databases. In early October 2026, just days after the close of the third quarter, a deadly explosion near Eunice in Lea County reportedly killed two people at a facility associated with Targa Resources.⁸

Targa's reporting history illustrates the broader concerns surrounding oil and gas infrastructure. During Q3 2026, the company reported **21 spills and releases** involving natural gas, condensate, and materials identified only as "other." Corrosion was the most frequently reported cause of Targa's spills. One incident reported **7,951 thousand cubic feet (Mcf) of methane gas** vented from a pipeline in Eddy County following equipment failure, ranking among the quarter's largest gaseous releases.

Although the October explosion falls outside this report's July–September reporting period, the tragedy underscores what spill statistics alone cannot capture: **the consequences of infrastructure failures are measured not only in gallons spilled or gas released, but also in human lives.** Stronger infrastructure oversight, preventative maintenance, and meaningful accountability are essential to protecting workers and nearby communities.

⁸ Targa's report of this deadly "event" – cause "unknown" – is available at <https://ocdimage.emnrd.nm.gov/imaging/IncidentFileView.aspx?incident=nAPP2628031312>.

WildEarth Guardians' Analysis

This month's data reveals:

❖ Increase in Pollution:

- Oil and gas operators reported 453 liquid spills in Q3 2026, a 29% increase compared with Q3 2025, a 23% increase over Q2 2026, and a 19% increase over Q1 2026. Although the total liquid volume declined from the previous quarter, the growing frequency of releases demonstrates persistent waste management and spill prevention problems. Reported gaseous spill volume also increased despite fewer gaseous spill records.

❖ Increase in Environmental & Public Health Risks from “Produced Water”:

- Produced-water accounted for 92% of reported liquid volume spilled in Q3. The quarter's largest liquid spill, attributed to a produced-water management company rather than an oil or gas producer, highlights the pollution risks associated with the infrastructure used to transport, store, and manage the industry's enormous waste stream. These risks warrant particular scrutiny as industry seeks to expand produced-water treatment, reuse, and discharge.

❖ Failures in Enforcement:

- Thousands of reported spills raise serious questions about whether existing regulatory oversight is adequately preventing repeat pollution. Yet publicly accessible records do not provide a comprehensive, easily searchable accounting of which incidents result in violations, penalties, or other enforcement actions. Greater transparency is essential to determining whether regulators are holding repeat polluters accountable.
- Trade secret loopholes continue to shield the oil and gas industry from accountability, allowing companies to conceal the identities of spilled chemicals. This secrecy undermines cleanup efforts, endangers worker and community health, and makes appropriate medical or emergency response nearly impossible.

Calls to Action

WildEarth Guardians urges policymakers to act immediately to protect New Mexico's communities, water, and air from rampant and recurring oil and gas spills:

- **Stop Toxic Waste Disasters:** Strengthen federal and state enforcement by requiring the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division (OCD), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to issue meaningful fines, deny permits for repeat violators, and publicly report all spill-related enforcement actions and outcomes.
- **Mandate Full Chemical Disclosure:** Require oil and gas companies to publicly disclose all chemicals used in drilling and fracking operations and spilled in waste, including trade secrets, to ensure transparency, public safety, and emergency preparedness.
- **Apply Hazardous Waste Laws:** Apply hazardous waste laws to oil and gas operations by removing regulatory exemptions under Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation (CERCLA), Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), and similar state laws, and classify produced-water and other industry byproducts by their chemical constituencies as hazardous waste with strict management and disposal standards.

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