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A community activist holds a sign referencing Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si' during a rally Oct. 4, 2017, outside the chancery of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Residents and allies of the University Park neighborhood were urging the archdiocese to end its lease with AllenCo Energy at the oil drilling site linked to health issues in their community. California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Feb. 11, 2026, that the site's oil wells have been permanently sealed. (Courtesy of STAND-LA)



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After more than a decade of community activism, a notorious oil drilling facility operating on land leased from the Los Angeles Archdiocese has been shuttered for good.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Feb. 11 that the 21 oil wells at the AllenCo Energy drilling site in south L.A.'s University Park neighborhood have been permanently plugged and sealed. The process was completed as part of a state effort to clean up orphaned oil and gas wells, with partial funding from the Biden administration's bipartisan infrastructure law.

The AllenCo site had become the center of a prolonged neighborhood struggle after residents in University Park, a predominantly Hispanic community, began complaining of toxic smells and health issues after AllenCo Energy in 2009 took over operations and ramped up drilling. The situation eventually caught the attention of Sen. Barbara Boxer, who in 2013 called on AllenCo to halt drilling and directed inspectors with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to visit the site. When they did, EPA officials also experienced respiratory issues.



Pope Francis speaks with California Gov. Gavin Newsom during an audience in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican May 16, 2024, with participants in a conference on climate resilience sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. (CNS/Vatican Media)

While AllenCo voluntarily suspended operations, neighborhood activists continued to press for a permanent end to oil drilling in their community. The long history of violations at the AllenCo site placed it atop the priority list for sealing abandoned oil wells, the governor's office said in a press release.

"The plugging of these 21 abandoned oil wells turns the page on decades of neglect and stalling tactics by this company," Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, said in a statement. "Thanks to the community's hard work and perseverance, this neighborhood can finally start a new chapter free of toxic pollution."

The land upon which the drilling site sits is owned by the Los Angeles Archdiocese, which has controlled it since the 1950s when the family of Edward Doheny, one of the city's early oil barons and a prominent Catholic philanthropist, donated the valuable parcel to the local church.

The drill site is nestled within the neighborhood, sitting across the street from an apartment complex, around the corner from Mount St. Mary's University and just blocks away from St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church.

Early in their struggle to halt oil drilling at the AllenCo site, neighborhood activists, a number of whom were St. Vincent parishioners, reached out to the archdiocese, which they said repeatedly rebuffed requests for dialogue. The People Not Pozos campaign staged several rallies aimed at the archdiocese, including one at the chancery in 2017, and regularly cited teachings from Pope Francis and his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" in which the late pope stressed the need to move away from the use of fossil fuels. At one point, the campaign organized a letter and video message from a young Catholic girl to Francis.

In statements and court filings, the archdiocese has maintained it has no direct control or oversight of the AllenCo site, nor did it have the ability to terminate the lease. It has said it supported efforts to ensure public safety and air quality regulations and has held conversations with city officials about the future of the site. The archdiocese has been involved in lawsuits relating to residents' health issues as well as with AllenCo Energy over who is responsible for ultimately cleaning up the site.



A demonstrator holds up a sign with a passage from Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" during a protest Oct. 4, 2017, outside the chancery of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Approximately 50 people attended the demonstration, urging the archdiocese to cancel a land lease agreement allowing oil drilling within a south LA neighborhood. (Courtesy of STAND-L.A.)

In a statement to EarthBeat, the archdiocese said it is "pleased" that the oil wells at the University Park drilling site have been successfully plugged.

"In keeping with the State's promise that the community begin a new chapter free of pollution, the Archdiocese will not cease its efforts to ensure that responsible parties honor their commitments to return the property to its natural state. Only then will the Archdiocese be able to make an informed decision on the future use of the land," the archdiocese said.

A spokeswoman for Mount St. Mary's similarly said the Catholic college is "glad" the wells are sealed off.

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Esperanza Community Housing, a community development nonprofit originally founded by a Catholic sister that led the People Not Pozos campaign and which operates the apartment across from the AllenCo site, celebrated the finality of oil drilling at the facility.

"This is a reflection of people power and a step towards repairing the harm imposed on our communities," it said in a statement.

Esperanza said it will continue to push for an end to neighborhood oil drilling across Los Angeles, a city that sits upon one of the largest oil basins in the world and where oil derricks are common sights.



The Los Angeles skyline is seen from nearby Angels Point Jan. 29, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Bing Guan)

The Los Angeles Archdiocese also owns the property at the Murphy drilling site, another neighborhood oil facility operated by E&B Natural Resources Management. For decades, the Murphy and AllenCo sites have served as revenue streams for the archdiocese, both from rental payments and oil royalties.

Drilling remains active in 28 of the 34 wells at the Murphy site, according to records with the California Geologic Energy Management agency (CalGEM). The site sits within half a mile of several schools. It has received dozens of violations since E&B Natural Resources began operations in 2019.

E&B Natural Resources filed one of the lawsuits that successfully rescinded city and county ordinances that banned new oil drilling and established 20-year phaseouts for existing operations. Both the city and county are working to reinstate the drilling bans and phaseouts following a 2025 state law clarifying that local governments have the authority to regulate and prohibit oil and gas drilling.

A separate state law (SB 1137) that went into effect in June 2024 established health protection zones where oil and gas operations are within 3,200 feet of community spaces that enforce enhanced health, safety and environmental requirements.

The Los Angeles Archdiocese in its statement said it has not had formal conversations with E&B Natural Resources about the buffer zone law's impact on drilling at the Murphy site and restated it lacks direct control of the site. E&B Natural Resources did not respond to a request for comment.

"The Archdiocese continues its commitment to ensuring that the health and well-being of the surrounding communities are protected and prioritized," it said.