

Advice to a New Pumper

- Habit is the key to mastery of the trade of pumping oil and gas wells. Develop the habit of doing things right; if you do something wrong, do not repeat your mistake.
- Make your rounds as closely as possible to the same time each day; this simplifies record keeping and allows your employer to make certain assumptions as to the well being of his leases. One should break routine only when a recurring engine, compressor, or control valve problem fails of diagnosis – visitation at a different time of day may provide insight.
- Keep good records. Write your gauges in a book – not on slips of paper. Maintain a safe place for run tickets; they are hard to replace when they blow out of your truck.
- Turn in your weekly or monthly reports on time if you expect your paycheck on time.
- Gauge daily – even though every well on a lease is hitting the same as the day before, a flow line leak or dump valve failure could cost you your job.
- Be on the alert for leaks of every sort and report them immediately.
- Never smoke on the tanks; even a water tank may give off enough gas to put you in orbit.
- Do not be embarrassed to ask a more experienced pumper for help; most are proud of their knowledge and willing to share it.
- Do not carry a supply store in the back of your truck; leave the supplies for each lease on each lease.
- When you pack a stuffing box, replace all the packing, not just the top rubber. Replace the follower and brass ring if necessary, and examine the part of the polish rod liner that is only exposed when the packing is pulled.
- Clean up around the wellhead after a stuffing box leak. Bioremediate if necessary.
- Stay on good terms with the surface owner if possible; this applies even if you are the surface owner.
- Record tubing and casing pressures each day on flowing wells whether or not required by your reports.
- Keep a sealed jar for the deposit of run tickets at each battery.
- Work adjustable chokes daily to address plugging by paraffin, sand, or ice. Pull and inspect positive choke inserts if there is a marked change in flow pressures.
- Never apply open flame to any vessel or valve; obtain a piece of metal flex hose that will mate with the exhaust pipe of your truck and apply this heat to the frozen part.
- Never turn on a flashlight over a thief hatch.
- Keep your production foreman informed of what is going on, but do not wart him to death.
- Do not wear loose clothing; shirts should be tucked in and sleeves buttoned. Long hair should be tied in a ponytail and secured in your cap or under your collar.

- Do not wash a running engine with gasoline or drip.
- Grease units at least monthly. Some operators may require weekly greasing, but this is generally a good way to destroy the seals. Check the gearbox oil weekly.
- If you do not understand a given set of instructions, ask the foreman to explain them to you. He knows that you are new, and does not expect you to know everything.
- Salt-water spills are more damaging to the environment than oil spills.
- Always disengage the engine and set the brake before greasing.
- Remember that not only the operator but also you yourself are legally responsible for ecological abuse.
- Do not park and take a nap near battery vent lines; you may wake up dead.
- Keep a window cracked when thawing compressors.
- Do not roll a tank with compressed air. Tanks should be circulated with a pump or rolled with lease gas, propane, or dry ice.
- Put your chemical in on time and use neither more or less than specified.
- Don't be a "windshield" pumper. Get out at each well, look for leaks, and listen for squeaks.
- Do not bid more wells than you can service properly. Eighteen is enough for a new pumper, and thirty-six for an experienced one. More can be seen after properly if they have been drilled on close spacing on the same lease.
- It is just as easy to pump a deep well as a shallow one.
- When pumping through long flow lines, check pressure at the pumping tee often, particularly during winter months. Paraffin can be removed easily by hot oiling if not allowed to go to far.
- Check engine water and oil daily.
- Keep belts tight but not tight enough to knock out bearings.
- Be present when hot oiling or steaming is carried out.
- Always allow yourself plenty of room; call in a tank as soon as it is ready. Sometimes this will be contraindicated by the office due to scheduled work over procedures or fluctuating oil prices.
- Take time to service and repair your truck; this is as much a part of pumping as is gauging the tanks. You cannot pump if you cannot get there.
- When raising or lowering the rods using a clamp and knockout, have a friend accompany you. This makes the operation a lot easier, plus you might get knocked in the head. When bumping bottom for gas lock or trash, use a light tap only. Never drive off and leave a well tapping hard – the rods may back off.
- Keep weeds from around your batteries. This lessens the danger of fire and snakebite. Your truck driver or gauger will eventually refuse to run your oil if this is not attended to. The same thing applies to meter loops and chart changers.

- Pumping is about paying attention. Be as alert as if you were running a drilling rig or well service unit.
- Never put on belts with the engine or motor running. Use the palm of your hand rather than your fingers to roll the belts on. Keep your hands away from the sheaves.
- Put the back of your hand to an electric box before touching it - should the box be hot, this may knock you away.
- Use fuse pullers to change or remove fuses. Never, never pry out the fuses with a screwdriver. This practice has killed many experienced pumpers and will even more easily kill a new one.
- Many oilfield fires can be put out simply by closing valves.
- Never step out on top of an old tank or frac tank. You cannot swim in oil or salt water if you fall in; both oil and salt water release gas that will asphyxiate you in a matter of minutes.
- During winter months, drain all fuel and control gas scrubbers daily.
- Never displace oil, gas, or condensate through an ungrounded rubber or plastic line. Their movement through a nonconducting line creates an electrostatic charge on the outside of that line which will spark to ground and cause an explosion. Consider this when wearing wool, nylon, or polyester clothing while gauging or transferring fluids.
- Items that must be carried at all times include: gauge line, color cut, eighteen, twenty-four, twelve-inch crescent, shop hammer, gauge book, and pencil. Pumping wells require a screwdriver, pigtail, and supply of stuffing box rubbers. Spark plugs, spark plug wrench, combination wrenches sufficient to remove the magneto, lube oil, coolant, and a squirt can of gasoline are needed for gas engines. Electric motors require the possession of fuses, a fuse puller, and a multi-meter. Special insulated gloves can be purchased which provide some protection against electrocution.
- Never leave a handle on the sell or bleeder valve of a stock tank. Some foremen like to keep a flat plug in the sell valves as an added precaution to running a tank out on the ground.
- Keep an eye out for paraffin. Ask your foreman how to detect it.
- The good pumper knows why a well is off (parted rods, stuck pump, hole in the tubing, pump barrel, rings, balls and seats, gas-locking, trash, etc.). If you have not worked on a well service unit, you must learn how to diagnose these conditions. Talk with your foreman and with other pumpers, and you will soon find out what you need to know.
- Don't carry around enough gasoline to blow your up your truck. A two-gallon safety can is enough to supply your yellow dog.
- Check for rags stuffed in the bypass line before allowing a stock tank to bypass.
- The main thing to remember about valves is clockwise to close, counter-clockwise to open. If you forget this, you will make a mess and you may get fired.
- Don't be scared to ask questions.