

*Approved by Utah Board of Oil, Gas and Mining, Jan. 23, 2013.*

**R649. Natural Resources; Oil, Gas and Mining; Oil and Gas.**

**R649-3. Drilling and Operating Practices.**

**R649-3-38. Surface Owner Protection Act Provisions.**

1. These rules and all subsequent revisions as approved by the board are developed pursuant to the requirements of the Surface Owner Protection Act of 2012 in Title 40, Chapter 6. It is the intent of the board and the division to encourage owners or operators and surface land owners to enter into surface use agreements. Surface use agreements should fairly consider the respective rights of the owner or operator and the surface land owner and also comply with the requirements of R649-3-34.

2. For the purposes of R649-3-38, these definitions are utilized.

2.1. "Crops" means any growing vegetative matter used for an agricultural purpose, including forage for grazing and domesticated animals.

2.2. "Oil and gas operations" means to explore for, develop, or produce oil and gas.

2.3. "Surface land" means privately owned land overlying privately owned oil and gas resources, upon which oil and gas operations are conducted, and owned by a surface land owner.

2.4. "Surface land owner" means a person who owns, in fee simple absolute, all or part of the surface land as shown by the records of the county where the surface land is located. Surface land owner does not include the surface land owner's lessee, renter, tenant, or other contractually related person.

2.5. "Surface land owner's property" means a surface land owner's surface land, crops on the surface land, and existing improvements on the surface land.

2.6. "Surface use agreement" means an agreement between an owner or operator and a surface land owner addressing the use and reclamation of surface land owned by the surface land owner and compensation for damage to the surface land caused by oil and gas operations that result in loss of the surface land owner's crops on the surface land, loss of value of existing improvements owned by the surface land owner on the surface land, and permanent damage to the surface land.

3. Oil and gas operations shall be conducted in such manner as to prevent unreasonable loss of a surface land owner's crops on surface land, unreasonable loss of value of existing improvements owned by a surface land owner on surface land, and unreasonable permanent damage to surface land.

4. In accordance with Section 40-6-20, an owner or operator may enter onto surface land under which the owner or operator holds rights to conduct oil and gas operations and use the surface land to the extent reasonably necessary to conduct oil and gas operations and consistent with allowing the surface land owner the greatest possible use of the surface land owner's property, to the extent that the surface land owner's use does not interfere with the owner's or operator's oil and gas operations.

4.1. Except as is reasonably necessary to conduct oil and gas operations, an owner or operator shall mitigate the effects of accessing the surface land owner's surface land, minimize interference with the surface land owner's use of the surface land owner's property, and compensate a surface land owner for unreasonable loss of a surface land owner's crops on the surface land, unreasonable loss of value to existing improvements owned by a surface land owner on the surface land, and unreasonable permanent damage to the surface land.

4.2. An owner or operator may but is not required to obtain location or spacing exceptions from the division or board or utilize directional or horizontal drilling techniques that are not technologically feasible, economically practicable, or reasonably available.

5. In accordance with Section 40-6-21, non-binding mediation may be requested by a surface land owner and an owner or operator, by providing written notice to the other party, if they are unable to agree on the amount of damages for unreasonable crop loss on the surface land, unreasonable loss of value to existing improvements owned by the surface land owner on the surface land, or unreasonable permanent damage to the surface land.

5.1. A mediator may be mutually selected by a surface land owner and an owner or operator from a listing of qualified mediators maintained by the division and the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, which includes the mediators identified on the Utah State Courts website with “property” or “real estate” as an area of expertise, or a mediator may be selected from any other source.

5.2. The surface land owner and the owner or operator shall equally share the cost of the mediator's services.

5.3. The mediation provisions of this subsection do not prevent or delay an owner or operator from conducting oil and gas operations in accordance with applicable law.

6. A surface use bond shall be furnished to the division by the owner or operator, in accordance with the following provisions of Subsection R649-3-38-6.

6.1. A surface use bond does not apply to surface land where the surface land owner is a party to, or a successor of a party to:

6.1.1. A lease of the underlying privately owned oil and gas;

6.1.2. A surface use agreement applicable to the surface land owner’s surface land; or

6.1.3. A contract, waiver, or release addressing an owner’s or operator’s use of the surface land owner’s surface land.

6.2. The surface use bond shall be in the amount of \$6,000 per well site and shall be conditioned upon the performance by the owner or operator of the duty to protect a surface land owner against unreasonable loss of crops on surface land, unreasonable loss of value of existing improvements, and unreasonable permanent damage to surface land.

6.3. The surface use bond shall be furnished to the division on Form 4S after good faith negotiation and prior to the approval of the application for permit to drill. The mediation process identified in R649-3-38-5 may commence and is encouraged to be completed.

6.4. The division may accept a surface use bond in the form of a cash account as provided in R649-3-1-10.2.1 or a certificate of deposit as provided in R649-3-1-10.2.3. Interest will remain within the account.

6.5. The division may allow the owner or operator, or a subsequent owner or operator, to replace an existing surface use bond with another bond that provides sufficient coverage.

6.6. The surface use bond shall remain in effect by the operator until released by the division.

6.7. The surface use bond shall be payable to the division for the use and benefit of the surface land owner, subject to the provisions of these rules.

6.8. The surface use bond shall be released to the owner or operator after the division receives sufficient information that:

6.8.1. A surface use agreement or other contractual agreement has been reached;

6.8.2. Final resolution of the judicial appeal process for an action for unreasonable damages, as defined in R649-3-38-6.2, has occurred and have been paid; or

6.8.3. Plugging and abandonment of the well is completed.

6.9. The division shall make a reasonable effort to contact the surface land owner prior to the division's release of the surface use bond.

**KEY: oil and gas law**

**Date of Enactment or Last Substantive Amendment: 2013**

**Authorizing, and Implemented or Interpreted Law: 40-6-5, 40-6-20, 40-6-21**