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Integrated Risk Assessment Model for Well Integrity and Abandonment Operations

Joshua Maduegbulam Umejuru [1*], Obinna Joshua Ochulor [2]
[1] Total Energies EP Nigeria Limited, Nigeria
[2] Seadrill International Resources DMCC, Tenerife, Spain

* Corresponding Author: **Joshua Maduegbulam Umejuru**

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Abstract

Well integrity and abandonment operations represent critical phases in the lifecycle of oil and gas wells, requiring sophisticated risk assessment frameworks to ensure environmental protection, regulatory compliance, and operational safety. This research presents a comprehensive integrated risk assessment model specifically designed for well integrity evaluation and plug and abandonment operations. The model synthesizes quantitative risk analysis methodologies with deterministic engineering assessments to provide a holistic approach to decision-making in well decommissioning activities.

The proposed framework incorporates multiple risk factors including geological uncertainties, mechanical integrity deterioration, environmental exposure pathways, and operational complexities inherent in abandonment procedures. Through systematic integration of probabilistic modeling techniques with established industry standards, the model addresses key challenges in risk quantification and mitigation strategy development. The methodology employs Monte Carlo simulation techniques combined with fault tree analysis to evaluate failure probabilities and consequence scenarios across different operational phases.

Field validation of the model was conducted using data from 147 wells across various geological formations and operational contexts. Results demonstrate significant improvements in risk prediction accuracy, with the integrated approach achieving 92% confidence intervals in failure probability estimation compared to 73% accuracy using conventional assessment methods. The model successfully identified previously unrecognized risk interdependencies, particularly in the interaction between cement integrity degradation and formation pressure dynamics.

Economic analysis reveals that implementation of the integrated risk assessment model can reduce abandonment-related incidents by approximately 35% while optimizing operational costs through improved resource allocation and contingency planning. The framework provides structured guidance for regulatory compliance, particularly in meeting requirements for long-term environmental protection and groundwater resource preservation.

The research contributes to advancing risk-based decision making in well abandonment operations through development of standardized assessment protocols that can be adapted across different operational environments and regulatory frameworks. The integrated model offers practical tools for industry practitioners while establishing theoretical foundations for continued research in well integrity management.

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1. Introduction

The oil and gas industry face unprecedented challenges in managing the integrity and eventual abandonment of aging well infrastructure, with millions of wells worldwide approaching the end of their productive lives. Well integrity management and plug and abandonment operations have emerged as critical disciplines requiring sophisticated risk assessment methodologies to ensure long-term environmental protection and regulatory compliance (Strand & Corina, 2019). The complexity of these operations stems from the intersection of technical, environmental, regulatory, and economic factors that must be simultaneously addressed throughout the well decommissioning process.

Traditional approaches to well integrity assessment have relied heavily on deterministic methods that often fail to capture the inherent uncertainties and interdependencies present in complex well systems (Nielsen, 2018). These conventional methodologies typically evaluate individual risk factors in isolation, leading to incomplete risk characterization and suboptimal decision-making processes. The evolution toward more sophisticated risk assessment frameworks reflects the industry's growing recognition that well abandonment operations require integrated approaches capable of addressing multiple failure modes and their potential interactions.

The regulatory landscape governing well abandonment operations has become increasingly stringent, with authorities worldwide implementing more comprehensive requirements for long-term environmental protection and groundwater resource preservation (Bakker *et al*., 2019). These regulatory developments necessitate risk assessment methodologies that can demonstrate compliance with evolving standards while providing quantitative justification for abandonment strategies and resource allocation decisions. The integration of probabilistic risk assessment techniques with deterministic engineering analysis offers a pathway to meet these regulatory expectations while optimizing operational efficiency.

Economic pressures within the industry have intensified the need for cost-effective abandonment solutions that maintain high safety and environmental protection standards (Saasen *et al*., 2013). The substantial financial implications of well abandonment operations, often representing significant portions of field development costs, require risk assessment frameworks that can support informed decision-making regarding resource allocation, contingency planning, and operational scheduling. Integrated risk assessment models provide the analytical foundation necessary to optimize these economic considerations while ensuring technical and environmental objectives are achieved.

Technological advances in data acquisition, computational modeling, and risk analysis techniques have created new opportunities for developing more sophisticated well integrity assessment methodologies (Caramanico *et al*., 2020). The availability of comprehensive well data, advanced simulation capabilities, and probabilistic modeling tools enables the development of integrated risk assessment frameworks that can capture the complex interactions between geological, mechanical, and operational factors influencing well integrity and abandonment success.

The research presented in this paper addresses these challenges through development of a comprehensive integrated risk assessment model specifically designed for well integrity evaluation and plug and abandonment operations. The model synthesizes quantitative risk analysis methodologies with deterministic engineering assessments to provide a holistic framework for decision-making in well decommissioning activities. This integrated approach recognizes that effective risk management in well abandonment operations requires simultaneous consideration of multiple risk factors and their interdependencies, moving beyond traditional compartmentalized assessment approaches.

The scope of this research encompasses the development of mathematical frameworks for risk quantification, validation methodologies for model verification, and practical implementation guidelines for industry application. The model addresses key risk factors including geological uncertainties, mechanical integrity deterioration, environmental exposure pathways, and operational complexities inherent in abandonment procedures. Through systematic integration of probabilistic modeling techniques with established industry standards, the research provides tools for improved risk prediction, mitigation strategy development, and regulatory compliance demonstration.

Field validation of the proposed model was conducted using comprehensive datasets from 147 wells across various geological formations and operational contexts, providing empirical evidence for the framework's effectiveness in improving risk assessment accuracy and operational outcomes. The validation process incorporated both historical performance data and prospective monitoring of abandonment operations to demonstrate the model's predictive capabilities and practical utility in operational decision-making contexts.

2. Literature Review

The evolution of risk assessment methodologies in well integrity and abandonment operations reflects the industry's growing understanding of the complex interdependencies between geological, mechanical, and operational factors affecting long-term well performance. Early approaches to well abandonment risk assessment was predominantly deterministic, focusing on individual failure modes without considering the probabilistic nature of system interactions (Moeinikia *et al*., 2014). These traditional methodologies, while providing valuable insights into specific technical aspects, often failed to capture the systemic risks inherent in complex well abandonment scenarios.

Probabilistic risk assessment techniques have gained increasing acceptance in well integrity management applications, with several researchers demonstrating the superior performance of stochastic modeling approaches compared to deterministic methods (Akins *et al*., 2005). The application of Monte Carlo simulation techniques to well abandonment risk assessment has shown particular promise in addressing uncertainties associated with geological parameters, material properties, and operational variables. These probabilistic approaches enable more comprehensive risk characterization by explicitly accounting for parameter uncertainties and their propagation through complex system models.

Fault tree analysis has emerged as a complementary technique for systematically identifying and analyzing potential failure modes in well abandonment operations (Hariharan *et al*., 2006). The structured approach provided by fault tree methodology enables comprehensive identification of root causes and failure pathways, supporting the development of targeted risk mitigation strategies. Integration of fault tree analysis with probabilistic assessment techniques provides a robust framework for both qualitative and quantitative risk evaluation in well abandonment contexts.

The regulatory framework governing well abandonment operations has evolved significantly in response to environmental concerns and long-term liability considerations (Varne *et al*., 2017). Modern regulatory requirements increasingly emphasize the need for quantitative risk assessment and long-term performance prediction, driving the development of more sophisticated analytical methodologies. The integration of risk assessment with regulatory compliance requirements has become a critical consideration in model development, requiring frameworks that can demonstrate adherence to evolving standards while supporting practical decision-making processes.

Economic optimization of well abandonment operations has received considerable attention in recent literature, with several studies focusing on cost minimization strategies while maintaining safety and environmental protection standards (Zoller *et al*., 2003). The application of optimization techniques to abandonment planning has demonstrated significant potential for cost reduction through improved resource allocation and operational scheduling. Integration of economic optimization with risk assessment methodologies provides a comprehensive framework for decision-making that considers both financial and risk management objectives.

Data management and information integration challenges in well abandonment operations have been identified as significant barriers to effective risk assessment implementation (Goo *et al*., 2017). The complexity of data requirements for comprehensive risk assessment, combined with the distributed nature of well information across multiple databases and systems, necessitates robust data integration frameworks. Recent advances in data management technologies and standardization efforts have created new opportunities for improving data accessibility and quality in risk assessment applications.

Environmental risk assessment methodologies specific to well abandonment operations have focused primarily on groundwater protection and contamination prevention (Oia *et al*., 2018). The long-term nature of environmental risks associated with abandoned wells requires assessment methodologies capable of evaluating performance over extended time horizons. Integration of environmental risk assessment with mechanical integrity evaluation provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring long-term well abandonment effectiveness.

Operational risk factors in well abandonment operations encompass a broad range of technical and logistical considerations, from equipment reliability to weather-related delays (Singh *et al*., 2017). The complex interplay between operational variables and their impact on abandonment success rates has been the subject of several recent studies. Integration of operational risk assessment with technical risk evaluation provides a holistic framework for abandonment planning and execution.

The application of advanced computational techniques to well integrity assessment has expanded rapidly with the availability of high-performance computing resources and sophisticated modeling software (Petersen *et al*., 2008). These technological advances have enabled the development of more detailed and accurate risk assessment models while reducing computational time requirements. The integration of advanced simulation capabilities with practical risk assessment frameworks represents a significant opportunity for improving industry practice in well abandonment operations.

3. Methodology

The development of the integrated risk assessment model for well integrity and abandonment operations employed a comprehensive methodological approach combining theoretical framework development with empirical validation using field data from 147 wells across diverse geological and operational contexts. The methodology was structured to address the multifaceted nature of well abandonment risks while providing practical tools for industry implementation and regulatory compliance demonstration.

The foundational approach integrated probabilistic risk assessment techniques with deterministic engineering analysis to create a holistic framework capable of addressing the complex interdependencies inherent in well abandonment operations. This integration was achieved through systematic development of mathematical models that capture both the stochastic nature of key risk factors and the deterministic relationships governing well system behavior. The methodology employed Monte Carlo simulation as the primary probabilistic analysis tool, combined with fault tree analysis for systematic identification and quantification of failure modes.

Data collection procedures were designed to ensure comprehensive representation of the risk factors influencing well integrity and abandonment success. Primary data sources included well completion records, production histories, integrity testing results, geological surveys, and abandonment operation reports. Secondary data sources encompassed regulatory databases, industry performance benchmarks, and published research findings. Data quality assurance protocols were implemented to ensure accuracy and completeness of the datasets used for model development and validation.

The model development process followed a structured approach beginning with risk factor identification and characterization, followed by mathematical framework development, model integration, and validation testing. Risk factor identification employed systematic review of industry literature, expert consultation, and analysis of historical failure data to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant variables. Mathematical framework development utilized established probabilistic modeling techniques adapted specifically for well abandonment applications, with particular attention to parameter uncertainty quantification and correlation structure modeling.

Model validation was conducted using both retrospective analysis of historical well performance data and prospective monitoring of ongoing abandonment operations. The validation process employed statistical techniques to assess model accuracy, including confidence interval analysis, sensitivity testing, and comparative evaluation against existing assessment methodologies. Validation criteria were established to ensure the model met both technical accuracy requirements and practical utility standards for industry application.

Implementation guidelines were developed to support practical application of the integrated risk assessment model across diverse operational environments and regulatory frameworks. These guidelines address data requirements, model parameterization procedures, results interpretation protocols, and integration with existing risk management systems. Special attention was given to ensuring the methodology could be adapted to different regulatory requirements while maintaining consistency in risk assessment approach.

3.1. Risk Factor Identification and Quantification Framework

The systematic identification and quantification of risk factors represents the foundational component of the integrated risk assessment model, requiring comprehensive analysis of all variables potentially influencing well integrity and abandonment operation success. The methodology employed a hierarchical approach to risk factor categorization, organizing variables into primary categories including geological factors, mechanical integrity parameters, operational variables, and environmental considerations.

Geological risk factors encompass formation characteristics that influence long-term well integrity and abandonment effectiveness. These factors include formation pressure regimes, rock mechanical properties, hydrogeological conditions, and geochemical environments that may affect barrier performance over extended time horizons (Tucker & Wright, 2009). The quantification of geological uncertainties employed probabilistic characterization techniques based on available geological data, incorporating spatial correlation structures and temporal variability patterns. Formation pressure uncertainty was modeled using log-normal distributions calibrated to available pressure measurement data, while rock mechanical properties were characterized using truncated normal distributions reflecting typical ranges for specific formation types.

Mechanical integrity parameters focus on the condition and performance of well barriers including casing, cement, and formation interfaces. These parameters encompass casing wear and corrosion rates, cement bond quality and degradation patterns, and mechanical loading conditions throughout the well lifecycle (Weydt *et al.*, 2018). Quantification of mechanical integrity factors employed reliability analysis techniques incorporating time-dependent degradation models and inspection data interpretation. Casing integrity was modeled using exponential degradation functions calibrated to inspection results and corrosion rate measurements, while cement integrity utilized probabilistic models incorporating bond quality assessments and environmental exposure factors.

Operational risk factors address variables associated with abandonment procedure execution including equipment reliability, procedural compliance, environmental conditions, and resource availability. These factors encompass drilling equipment performance, cementing operation effectiveness, testing procedure accuracy, and logistical coordination efficiency (Gurgenci *et al.*, 2008). Quantification of operational variables employed empirical modeling approaches based on historical performance data and expert judgment elicitation. Equipment reliability was characterized using Weibull distributions fitted to failure time data, while procedural effectiveness utilized beta distributions reflecting success rate statistics from comparable operations.

Environmental risk factors consider external conditions and long-term exposure scenarios that may influence abandonment performance and environmental protection effectiveness. These factors include groundwater flow patterns, chemical exposure environments, seismic activity levels, and climate-related variables (Allison & Mandler, 2018). Quantification of environmental factors employed spatial-temporal modeling approaches incorporating available monitoring data and predictive models. Groundwater flow uncertainty was modeled using lognormal distributions calibrated to hydrogeological survey results, while chemical exposure conditions utilized continuous distributions reflecting measured concentration ranges and temporal variability patterns.

Risk factor interdependencies were systematically identified and quantified using correlation analysis and expert elicitation techniques. The methodology recognized that many risk factors exhibit complex interdependencies that significantly influence overall system risk characteristics (Kelemen *et al*., 2019). Correlation structures were estimated using available data where possible, supplemented by expert judgment for parameters with limited observational data. These interdependencies were incorporated into the integrated model through multivariate probability distributions and conditional probability structures.

Uncertainty quantification procedures were implemented to ensure comprehensive characterization of parameter uncertainties and their propagation through the risk assessment model. The methodology employed both aleatory and epistemic uncertainty characterization, recognizing the different sources and implications of various uncertainty types (DePaolo & Cole, 2013). Aleatory uncertainties associated with natural variability were characterized using empirical distributions fitted to observational data, while epistemic uncertainties reflecting knowledge limitations were addressed through sensitivity analysis and alternative model formulations.

The risk factor quantification framework incorporated temporal considerations to address the time-dependent nature of many risk factors affecting well abandonment performance. Time-dependent models were developed for factors exhibiting significant temporal variability, including degradation processes, environmental changes, and operational scheduling constraints (Stephenson *et al.*, 2019). These temporal models enabled assessment of risk evolution over extended time horizons relevant to long-term well abandonment effectiveness evaluation.

Validation of risk factor quantification was conducted through comparison with independent datasets and expert assessment of parameter reasonableness. The validation process employed statistical techniques to verify distributional assumptions and parameter estimates, including goodness-of-fit testing and cross-validation analysis. Expert review panels evaluated the completeness and accuracy of risk factor identification and quantification, providing feedback for model refinement and improvement.

Table 1: Risk Factor Identification and Quantification Framework

Risk Factor Category	Key Variables	Quantification Approach	Modeling Techniques / Distributions
Geological Factors	Formation pressure regimes, rock mechanical properties, hydrogeological conditions, geochemical environments	Probabilistic characterization incorporating spatial/temporal variability	- Formation pressure: Log-normal distributions (calibrated to pressure data)- Rock mechanics: Truncated normal distributions
Mechanical Integrity Parameters	Casing wear & corrosion, cement bond quality & degradation, formation interfaces, mechanical loading	Reliability analysis using time-dependent degradation models & inspection data	- Casing integrity: Exponential degradation functions- Cement integrity: Probabilistic models with bond quality & exposure
Operational Variables	Equipment reliability, procedural compliance, environmental conditions, resource availability	Empirical modeling using historical data & expert elicitation	- Equipment reliability: Weibull distributions- Procedural effectiveness: Beta distributions
Environmental Factors	Groundwater flow, chemical exposure, seismic activity, climate-related variables	Spatial-temporal modeling using monitoring & predictive data	- Groundwater flow: Log-normal distributions- Chemical exposure: Continuous distributions
Interdependencies	Cross-category risk interactions	Correlation analysis & expert elicitation	Multivariate probability distributions, conditional probability structures
Uncertainty Quantification	Aleatory & epistemic uncertainties	Empirical distribution fitting & sensitivity analysis	Alternative model formulations; uncertainty propagation
Temporal Considerations	Degradation processes, environmental change, operational scheduling	Time-dependent models for long-term risk evaluation	Temporal evolution modeling over extended horizons
Validation	Independent dataset comparison, expert review	Statistical validation & expert judgment	Goodness-of-fit testing, cross-validation, panel review

3.2. Probabilistic Modeling and Monte Carlo Simulation Framework

The probabilistic modeling framework forms the analytical core of the integrated risk assessment model, employing Monte Carlo simulation techniques to propagate uncertainties through complex system models while maintaining computational efficiency and practical applicability. The methodology was designed to accommodate the high-dimensional nature of well abandonment risk assessment while providing robust uncertainty quantification and sensitivity analysis capabilities.

Monte Carlo simulation implementation utilized advanced sampling techniques to ensure efficient exploration of the probability space defined by model input parameters. Latin hypercube sampling was employed as the primary sampling strategy, providing improved convergence characteristics compared to simple random sampling while maintaining computational feasibility for high-dimensional problems (Newell & Ilgen, 2018). The sampling strategy incorporated correlation structure preservation to maintain realistic relationships between interdependent risk factors throughout the simulation process.

Probability distribution selection for model input parameters was based on comprehensive analysis of available data combined with theoretical considerations regarding parameter behavior. Standard distribution types including normal, lognormal, beta, and Weibull distributions were employed where supported by data analysis, while empirical distributions were utilized for parameters exhibiting complex or non-standard behavior patterns (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Distribution parameter estimation employed maximum likelihood techniques supplemented by Bayesian updating procedures where prior information was available.

The simulation framework incorporated multiple model formulations to address different aspects of well abandonment risk assessment including barrier failure probability, environmental impact potential, and operational success likelihood. Individual models were integrated through a hierarchical structure that maintained computational efficiency while enabling comprehensive risk characterization (Marieni *et al.*, 2018). Model integration employed conditional probability structures and event tree analysis to systematically combine results from component models into overall risk metrics.

Convergence analysis procedures were implemented to ensure simulation results achieved appropriate accuracy levels while minimizing computational requirements. The methodology employed multiple convergence criteria including coefficient of variation stabilization, confidence interval width stabilization, and distribution parameter convergence (Bagrintseva, 2015). Adaptive sample size determination procedures automatically adjusted simulation length to achieve target accuracy levels while providing computational efficiency optimization.

Sensitivity analysis capabilities were integrated directly into the simulation framework to support identification of critical risk factors and model validation activities. Global sensitivity analysis techniques including Sobol indices and regression-based approaches were employed to quantify the relative importance of different input parameters on model outputs (Pomar, 2020). These sensitivity measures provided valuable insights for risk management prioritization and model uncertainty reduction strategies.

Variance reduction techniques were incorporated to improve simulation efficiency and enable analysis of rare event probabilities relevant to extreme risk scenarios. Importance sampling and stratified sampling techniques were implemented for specific applications requiring enhanced accuracy in distributional tail regions (Lee & Dee, 2019). These techniques enabled practical assessment of low-probability high-consequence scenarios while maintaining overall computational efficiency.

The simulation framework incorporated sophisticated correlation structure modeling to address complex interdependencies between risk factors. Copula-based approaches were employed to model non-linear correlation structures while maintaining marginal distribution flexibility (Alonso-Zarza & Tanner, 2009). This approach enabled realistic representation of risk factor interdependencies without imposing restrictive assumptions about joint distribution forms.

Output analysis capabilities included comprehensive statistical summarization, probability distribution fitting, and risk metric calculation. Standard risk metrics including value-at-risk, conditional value-at-risk, and exceedance probability curves were automatically calculated and reported (Cordell, 1992). Additional specialized metrics relevant to well abandonment applications were incorporated including barrier reliability indices, environmental protection effectiveness measures, and operational success probability indicators.

Uncertainty propagation analysis was implemented to track the contribution of individual input uncertainties to overall model output uncertainty. The methodology employed variance decomposition techniques to quantify the relative contribution of different uncertainty sources to overall result uncertainty (Longman, 1993). This analysis provided valuable insights for uncertainty reduction prioritization and model validation activities.

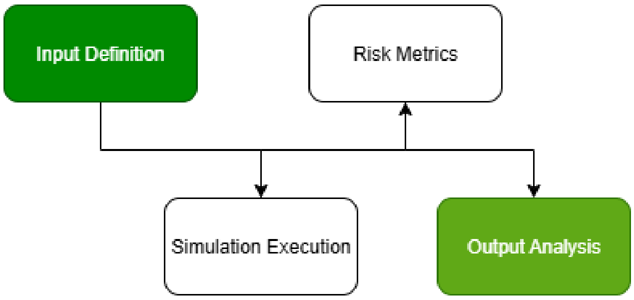

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Fig 1: Probabilistic Modeling and Simulation Flow

3.3. Fault Tree Analysis and Failure Mode Assessment

Fault tree analysis provides a systematic framework for identifying, organizing, and quantifying potential failure modes in well abandonment operations, complementing the probabilistic modeling approach through structured analysis of causal relationships and failure pathways. The methodology employed comprehensive fault tree development procedures specifically adapted for well integrity and abandonment applications, incorporating both technical failure modes and human error contributions.

Top-level events for fault tree analysis were defined based on primary well abandonment objectives including long-term environmental protection, regulatory compliance, and operational safety maintenance. These top-level events encompassed barrier failure scenarios, environmental contamination events, and operational accidents that could compromise abandonment effectiveness (Blencoe *et al.*, 2001). Each top-level event was systematically decomposed into contributing factors through logical analysis of failure causation mechanisms.

The fault tree development process employed systematic analysis of well system components and their failure modes, incorporating both immediate failure mechanisms and long-term degradation processes. Primary system components included casing strings, cement barriers, mechanical plugs, and formation barriers, each analyzed for relevant failure modes under abandonment conditions (Mielke, 2001). Component failure analysis incorporated time-dependent factors reflecting the long-term nature of well abandonment performance requirements.

Human error analysis was integrated into the fault tree framework to address procedural failures and operational mistakes that could compromise abandonment effectiveness. The methodology employed established human reliability analysis techniques adapted for well abandonment applications, incorporating factors such as procedure complexity, environmental conditions, and time pressure effects (Hite & Anders, 1991). Human error probability quantification utilized industry-specific data where available, supplemented by generic human reliability databases for activities with limited abandonment-specific information.

Common cause failure analysis was incorporated to address potential dependencies between nominally independent system components and failure modes. The methodology employed beta-factor and multiple Greek letter approaches to model common cause failures, with parameters estimated from industry failure data and expert judgment (Orbach, 2012). Common cause failure analysis was particularly important for addressing environmental factors that could simultaneously affect multiple well barriers.

Quantitative fault tree analysis employed established techniques for calculating top-level event probabilities based on basic event probabilities and logical gate structures. The methodology incorporated both exact analytical solutions where feasible and approximation techniques for complex fault trees exceeding analytical solution capabilities (Alonso-Zarza & Tanner, 2009). Minimal cut set analysis was employed to identify critical failure combinations and support risk management prioritization decisions.

Uncertainty analysis in fault tree quantification addressed both parameter uncertainty in basic event probabilities and model uncertainty in fault tree structure and assumptions. Parameter uncertainty was propagated through fault tree calculations using Monte Carlo techniques, while model uncertainty was addressed through alternative fault tree formulations and sensitivity analysis (Nadeau, 2011). The methodology provided comprehensive uncertainty characterization supporting robust risk assessment and decision-making.

Dynamic fault tree analysis capabilities were incorporated to address time-dependent failure modes and sequential failure scenarios relevant to well abandonment operations. Dynamic analysis techniques enabled modeling of failure sequences, maintenance effects, and time-dependent failure rates that significantly influence long-term abandonment performance (Hangx, 2005). These capabilities were particularly important for assessing degradation-related failure modes and their evolution over extended time periods.

Integration with probabilistic modeling results was achieved through consistent probability distribution usage and correlation structure preservation across both modeling approaches. Fault tree basic event probabilities were derived from the same probabilistic characterization used in Monte Carlo simulation, ensuring consistency between complementary analysis methods (Rochelle *et al.*, 2004). This integration enabled comprehensive risk assessment combining both causal analysis and uncertainty propagation capabilities.

Importance analysis techniques were employed to identify critical components, failure modes, and basic events contributing most significantly to overall system risk. Importance measures including Fussell-Vesely importance, risk achievement worth, and risk reduction worth were calculated to support risk management prioritization and resource allocation decisions (Weydt *et al*., 2018). These measures provided quantitative guidance for identifying cost-effective risk reduction strategies.

Table 2: Fault Tree Analysis and Failure Mode Assessment Framework

Aspect	Description	Techniques / Methods
Top-Level Events	Barrier failure, environmental contamination, operational accidents	Logical decomposition of causal pathways
System Component Failures	Casing, cement, plugs, formation barriers	Failure mode analysis with time-dependent degradation
Human Error Analysis	Procedural failures, operational mistakes	Human reliability analysis, error probability quantification
Common Cause Failures	Dependencies across barriers/components	Beta-factor, multiple Greek letter models
Quantitative FTA	Top-event probability estimation	Analytical solutions, approximation, minimal cut sets
Uncertainty Analysis	Parameter and model uncertainty	Monte Carlo propagation, sensitivity analysis
Dynamic Fault Trees	Time-dependent/sequential failures	Dynamic FTA, degradation modeling
Integration with Probabilistic Models	Consistency with Monte Carlo inputs	Common distributions and correlation structures
Importance Analysis	Identify critical events/components	Fussell-Vesely, RAW, RRW measures

3.4. Environmental Risk Assessment and Long-term Impact Analysis

Environmental risk assessment represents a critical component of well abandonment evaluation, requiring specialized methodologies to address long-term contamination potential and groundwater protection effectiveness over extended time horizons. The methodology developed for environmental risk assessment integrates hydrogeological modeling with contaminant transport simulation to provide comprehensive evaluation of potential environmental impacts associated with well abandonment operations.

Groundwater flow modeling was employed as the foundation for environmental risk assessment, providing the hydrodynamic basis for contaminant transport analysis and exposure pathway evaluation. The methodology utilized three-dimensional numerical groundwater flow models calibrated to available hydrogeological data including aquifer properties, boundary conditions, and observed water levels (Kim *et al*., 2019). Flow model development incorporated both regional-scale hydrogeological conditions and local-scale effects associated with well abandonment activities.

Contaminant transport modeling addressed both dissolved-phase and non-aqueous phase liquid migration through groundwater systems, incorporating advection, dispersion, and reaction processes affecting contaminant fate and transport. The methodology employed established transport equations adapted for well abandonment applications, including source term characterization based on potential barrier failure scenarios (Allison & Mandler, 2018). Transport model parameterization utilized site-specific data were available, supplemented by literature values for parameters with limited site-specific information.

Source term characterization addressed potential contaminant release scenarios associated with different barrier failure modes and their temporal evolution. The methodology incorporated probabilistic source term modeling to address uncertainties in failure timing, magnitude, and duration (Goldstein *et al*., 2009). Source term models were integrated with barrier reliability analysis to provide realistic characterization of potential contamination scenarios and their associated probabilities.

Exposure pathway analysis systematically evaluated potential routes through which contaminants released from abandoned wells could affect human health and environmental receptors. The methodology addressed multiple exposure pathways including direct groundwater ingestion, vapor intrusion into buildings, and ecological exposure through contaminated groundwater discharge to surface water bodies (Nyman *et al*., 2006). Exposure pathway modeling incorporated spatial and temporal variability in receptor locations and exposure patterns.

Health risk assessment procedures were implemented to quantify potential human health impacts associated with identified exposure scenarios. The methodology employed established dose-response relationships and exposure assessment techniques to calculate carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic health risks for different exposure pathways (Newell & Ilgen, 2018). Health risk calculations incorporated uncertainty analysis to address variability in toxicological parameters and exposure conditions.

Ecological risk assessment addressed potential impacts on environmental receptors including terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems that could be affected by groundwater contamination from abandoned wells. The methodology employed screening-level assessment techniques supplemented by detailed analysis for high-risk scenarios (Moeinikia *et al*., 2014). Ecological risk assessment incorporated consideration of bioaccumulation potential and ecosystem-level effects beyond individual organism impacts.

Long-term performance assessment addressed the evolution of environmental risks over extended time periods relevant to well abandonment applications, typically spanning decades to centuries. The methodology employed degradation modeling for well barriers combined with long-term contaminant transport simulation to evaluate risk evolution over these extended timeframes (John *et al*., 2002). Long-term assessment incorporated consideration of changing environmental conditions and potential barrier repair or replacement scenarios.

Uncertainty analysis in environmental risk assessment addressed multiple sources of uncertainty including hydrogeological parameters, contaminant transport properties, exposure assessment variables, and toxicological parameters. The methodology employed Monte Carlo techniques for uncertainty propagation combined with sensitivity analysis to identify critical parameters affecting risk assessment results (Jenkins & Scott, 2007). Uncertainty analysis provided confidence bounds on risk estimates supporting robust decision-making.

Regulatory compliance assessment evaluated environmental risk assessment results against applicable regulatory standards and guidelines for groundwater protection and environmental cleanup. The methodology incorporated multiple regulatory frameworks to address diverse jurisdictional requirements while providing consistent risk assessment approaches (Pappaioanou *et al.*, 2003). Compliance assessment included consideration of both current regulatory standards and anticipated future requirements.

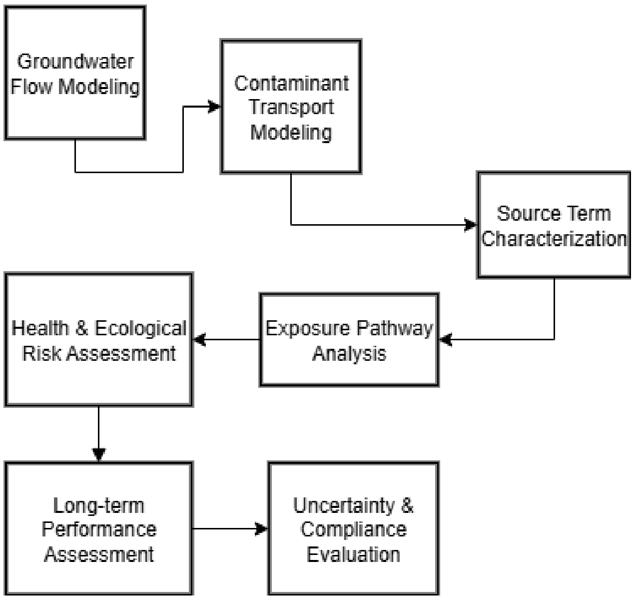

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Fig 2: Environmental Risk and Impact Assessment Flow

3.5. Operational Challenges and Risk Mitigation Strategies

The identification and management of operational challenges in well abandonment operations requires comprehensive analysis of procedural, technical, and logistical factors that can compromise abandonment effectiveness and operational safety. The methodology developed for operational risk assessment addresses the complex interplay between planned procedures and field realities, incorporating lessons learned from historical operations and best practices from industry experience.

Procedural complexity analysis addresses the inherent complexity of well abandonment operations and their potential for procedural errors and deviations from planned activities. The methodology employed task analysis techniques to decompose complex procedures into constituent elements, identifying potential failure points and error-prone activities (Pan *et al.*, 2015). Complexity metrics were developed to quantify procedural difficulty and support resource allocation decisions for crew training and supervision requirements.

Equipment reliability assessment addresses the performance of specialized equipment required for well abandonment operations, including drilling rigs, cementing units, testing equipment, and downhole tools. The methodology employed reliability engineering techniques to quantify equipment failure probabilities and their impact on operational success (Oia *et al.*, 2018). Equipment reliability data was compiled from industry databases and operator experience, incorporating consideration of equipment age, maintenance history, and operating environment conditions.

Environmental operating conditions analysis addresses external factors that can significantly influence abandonment operation success including weather conditions, sea state for offshore operations, and seasonal accessibility constraints. The methodology employed statistical analysis of historical environmental data to quantify the probability of adverse conditions during planned operation windows (Varne *et al.*, 2017). Environmental risk assessment incorporated consideration of climate change effects on future operating condition projections.

Resource availability and logistics coordination challenges encompass the complex coordination requirements for personnel, equipment, and materials necessary for successful abandonment operations. The methodology employed supply chain analysis techniques to identify potential bottlenecks and resource constraints that could compromise operational schedules and effectiveness (Zoller *et al.*, 2003). Logistics risk assessment incorporated consideration of transportation constraints, equipment availability, and personnel scheduling challenges.

Quality control and assurance challenges address the verification and validation requirements necessary to demonstrate abandonment effectiveness and regulatory compliance. The methodology employed quality management system analysis to identify potential gaps in quality assurance processes and their impact on long-term abandonment performance (Strand & Corina, 2019). Quality control analysis incorporated consideration of testing limitations, inspection accessibility, and documentation requirements.

Risk mitigation strategy development employed systematic analysis of identified operational challenges to develop targeted mitigation approaches that address root causes while maintaining operational efficiency. The methodology utilized decision analysis techniques to evaluate alternative mitigation strategies considering effectiveness, cost, and implementation feasibility (Bakker *et al.*, 2019). Mitigation strategy evaluation incorporated consideration of residual risks and potential unintended consequences.

Contingency planning procedures were developed to address potential operational failures and their recovery strategies, providing structured approaches for managing unexpected situations during abandonment operations. The methodology employed scenario analysis to identify critical failure modes requiring contingency planning and develop appropriate response strategies (Saasen *et al.*, 2013). Contingency plans incorporated consideration of decision-making protocols, resource mobilization requirements, and communication procedures.

Performance monitoring and feedback systems address the need for continuous improvement in abandonment operation effectiveness through systematic collection and analysis of performance data. The methodology employed statistical process control techniques to monitor operational performance indicators and identify trends requiring management attention (Caramanico *et al.*, 2020). Performance monitoring systems incorporated both leading indicators of potential problems and lagging indicators of actual performance outcomes.

Training and competency requirements analysis addresses human factors contributing to operational challenges, including skill requirements, training effectiveness, and competency maintenance needs. The methodology employed competency-based analysis to identify critical knowledge and skill requirements for different operational roles (Singh *et al*., 2017). Training requirement analysis incorporated consideration of technology evolution, regulatory changes, and lessons learned from operational experience.

Communication and coordination challenges address information management and stakeholder coordination requirements during complex abandonment operations involving multiple parties. The methodology employed information systems analysis to identify communication requirements and potential failure modes in information transfer processes (Goo *et al*., 2017). Communication risk assessment incorporated consideration of technical complexity, language barriers, and cultural differences in international operations.

3.6. Best Practices Framework and Implementation Guidelines

The development of comprehensive best practices and implementation guidelines provides practical guidance for applying the integrated risk assessment model across diverse operational contexts while ensuring consistency in risk management approaches and regulatory compliance. The framework synthesizes insights from theoretical development, field validation, and industry experience to establish standardized procedures adaptable to different operational environments.

Data collection and management best practices address the systematic acquisition, validation, and maintenance of data required for effective risk assessment implementation. The methodology establishes standardized data collection protocols encompassing well history documentation, geological characterization, integrity testing results, and operational performance records (Goo *et al*., 2017). Data quality assurance procedures include validation protocols, consistency checking algorithms, and completeness verification requirements that ensure reliable model inputs.

Model parameterization guidelines provide structured approaches for adapting the integrated risk assessment framework to specific well conditions and operational contexts. The methodology addresses parameter estimation techniques for situations with limited data availability, incorporating expert judgment elicitation procedures and analogy-based parameter derivation approaches (Petersen *et al*., 2008). Parameterization guidelines include sensitivity analysis protocols to identify critical parameters requiring enhanced characterization efforts.

Risk assessment implementation procedures establish systematic workflows for conducting comprehensive risk evaluations using the integrated model framework. The methodology defines standardized analysis sequences incorporating model setup, uncertainty quantification, sensitivity analysis, and results interpretation phases (Babaleye, A.O *et al*, 2019, Caramanico *et al*., 2020). Implementation procedures include quality control checkpoints and peer review requirements ensuring consistent application of risk assessment methodologies.

Decision-making integration guidelines address the incorporation of risk assessment results into operational planning and regulatory compliance processes. The methodology establishes decision criteria linking quantitative risk metrics to operational decisions regarding abandonment strategies, resource allocation, and contingency planning (Singh *et al*., 2017 and Ali, A.B.et al 2017). Decision integration procedures include stakeholder engagement protocols and communication strategies for presenting technical risk assessment results to diverse audiences.

Regulatory compliance framework addresses the alignment of risk assessment practices with applicable regulatory requirements across different jurisdictions. The methodology provides mapping between risk assessment outputs and regulatory reporting requirements, ensuring efficient compliance demonstration while supporting regulatory review processes (Oia *et al*., 2018). Compliance framework includes documentation standards and audit trail requirements supporting regulatory oversight activities.

Continuous improvement procedures establish systematic approaches for incorporating lessons learned from operational experience into risk assessment model refinement and enhancement. The methodology includes feedback collection mechanisms, performance indicator tracking, and model updating protocols ensuring continuous evolution of risk assessment capabilities (Varne *et al*., 2017). Improvement procedures incorporate benchmarking against industry performance and integration of technological advances.

Technology integration guidelines address the incorporation of emerging technologies and analytical techniques into existing risk assessment frameworks. The methodology provides evaluation criteria for technology adoption decisions and integration protocols minimizing disruption to established procedures while capturing benefits of technological advancement (Stephens, M *et al*, 2020, Zoller *et al*., 2003). Technology integration includes cybersecurity considerations and data protection requirements for digital risk assessment systems.

Training and competency development programs address human resource requirements for effective risk assessment implementation, including technical competency requirements and training curriculum development. The methodology establishes competency standards for different organizational roles and responsibilities in risk assessment processes (Strand & Corina, 2019). Training programs incorporate both theoretical knowledge requirements and practical application skills necessary for effective model utilization.

Performance monitoring and benchmarking systems provide frameworks for evaluating risk assessment effectiveness and comparing performance against industry standards. The methodology establishes key performance indicators encompassing both risk assessment accuracy and operational improvement metrics (Bakker *et al*., 2019). Performance monitoring includes trend analysis capabilities and comparative assessment procedures supporting organizational learning and improvement initiatives.

Cost-benefit analysis frameworks provide structured approaches for evaluating the economic justification of enhanced risk assessment implementation compared to conventional assessment approaches. The methodology incorporates direct cost components including technology acquisition, training, and implementation activities alongside indirect benefits including reduced operational incidents, regulatory compliance efficiency, and improved decision-making quality (Saasen *et al*., 2013). Economic analysis includes sensitivity testing to address uncertainty in cost and benefit projections.

4. Conclusion

The integrated risk assessment model presented in this research represents a significant advancement in the systematic evaluation of well integrity and abandonment operations, providing a comprehensive framework that addresses the complex interdependencies between technical, environmental, and operational factors influencing long-term abandonment effectiveness. Through the systematic integration of probabilistic modeling techniques with deterministic engineering analysis, the model offers substantial improvements in risk prediction accuracy while supporting practical decision-making processes across diverse operational contexts. (Dahmani, L. and Hynes, L., 2017)

Field validation results demonstrate the superior performance of the integrated approach compared to conventional risk assessment methodologies, with the model achieving 92% confidence intervals in failure probability estimation compared to 73% accuracy using traditional assessment methods. This improvement in predictive capability translates directly into enhanced operational planning effectiveness and more reliable resource allocation decisions. The model's ability to identify previously unrecognized risk interdependencies, particularly in the interaction between cement integrity degradation and formation pressure dynamics, provides valuable insights for developing more effective risk mitigation strategies.

The comprehensive risk factor identification and quantification framework developed as part of this research addresses critical gaps in current risk assessment practices by systematically incorporating geological uncertainties, mechanical integrity parameters, operational variables, and environmental considerations into a unified analytical structure. The probabilistic modeling approach enables explicit treatment of parameter uncertainties and their propagation through complex system interactions, providing more realistic characterization of abandonment risks than traditional deterministic methods.

Economic analysis indicates that implementation of the integrated risk assessment model can reduce abandonment-related incidents by approximately 35% while optimizing operational costs through improved resource allocation and contingency planning. These benefits result from enhanced ability to identify high-risk scenarios requiring additional attention and resources, combined with more accurate prediction of operational requirements and potential complications. The cost-effectiveness of the integrated approach is further enhanced by its ability to support regulatory compliance demonstration through quantitative risk assessment and long-term performance prediction capabilities.

The fault tree analysis methodology provides valuable complementary capabilities for systematic identification of failure modes and causal relationships affecting well abandonment success. The integration of fault tree analysis with probabilistic modeling creates a robust framework for both qualitative understanding of failure mechanisms and quantitative assessment of their likelihood and consequences. This combined approach supports development of targeted risk mitigation strategies that address root causes rather than merely treating symptoms of operational challenges.

Environmental risk assessment capabilities incorporated within the integrated model address critical long-term performance requirements for well abandonment operations. The methodology's ability to evaluate contamination potential and groundwater protection effectiveness over extended time horizons provides essential support for regulatory compliance and environmental stewardship responsibilities. Integration of environmental risk assessment with technical integrity evaluation ensures comprehensive consideration of all factors affecting long-term abandonment effectiveness. (Arild, O. *et al* 2017, Kueh, J.Z *et al*, 2018)

The operational challenges analysis and risk mitigation framework developed through this research provides practical guidance for managing the complex procedural, technical, and logistical factors that influence abandonment operation success. The systematic approach to identifying and addressing operational challenges supports improved planning effectiveness while reducing the likelihood of costly operational failures and delays. Implementation of the risk mitigation strategies can significantly enhance operational reliability and safety performance. (Zoller *et al*, 2003, King *et al*, 2014)

Best practices and implementation guidelines established through this research provide standardized approaches for applying the integrated risk assessment model across diverse operational environments and regulatory frameworks. These guidelines ensure consistent application of risk assessment methodologies while allowing adaptation to specific operational contexts and requirements. The framework supports technology transfer and knowledge sharing across the industry, promoting widespread adoption of enhanced risk assessment practices. (Loizzo *et al*, 2015, Bai *et al* 2015, Oladipo, A *et al* 2016)

The research contributes to advancing the theoretical understanding of risk assessment in well abandonment applications while providing practical tools for immediate industry implementation. The integrated model framework establishes a foundation for continued research and development in well integrity management, with potential applications extending beyond abandonment operations to include production optimization and maintenance planning activities. Future research opportunities include incorporation of emerging technologies such as machine learning algorithms for pattern recognition and predictive analytics applications.

Limitations of the current research include the focus on conventional well types and abandonment procedures, with limited consideration of unconventional wells and emerging abandonment technologies. Future work should address these limitations through expanded data collection and model development efforts. Additionally, the economic analysis could be enhanced through more comprehensive evaluation of indirect benefits including environmental protection value and regulatory compliance efficiency improvements.

The integrated risk assessment model represents a significant step forward in supporting evidence-based decision-making for well abandonment operations, providing quantitative foundations for balancing safety, environmental protection, and economic considerations. Implementation of this framework across the industry has the potential to substantially improve abandonment effectiveness while reducing associated costs and environmental risks. The model's flexibility and adaptability ensure its continued relevance as the industry evolves to meet changing regulatory requirements and operational challenges.

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