

US rig count increases by 17

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HOUSTON -- The number of rigs actively exploring for oil and natural gas in the U.S. increased by 17 this week to 1,444.

Houston-based Baker Hughes Inc. said Friday that 941 rigs were exploring for natural gas and 489 for oil. Fourteen were listed as miscellaneous. A year ago this week, the rig count stood at 1,039.

Of the major oil- and gas-producing states, Texas gained five rigs, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania each gained four, Alaska and North Dakota each gained two, and Arkansas and West Virginia each gained one. Colorado and New Mexico each lost three rigs, while California, Louisiana and Wyoming were unchanged.

The rig count tally peaked at 4,530 in 1981, during the height of the oil boom, and it fell to a record low of 488 in 1999.