

Private Drinking Wells

What You Can Do

Private, individual wells are the responsibility of the homeowner. To help protect your well, here are some steps you can take:

Have your water tested periodically. It is recommended that water be tested every year for total coli form bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels. If you suspect other contaminants, test for those. Always use a state certified laboratory that conducts drinking water tests. Since these can be expensive, spend some time identifying potential problems.

Testing more than once a year may be warranted in special situations:

- someone in your household is pregnant or nursing
- there are unexplained illnesses in the family
- your neighbors find a dangerous contaminant in their water
- you note a change in water taste, odor, color or clarity
- there is a spill of chemicals or fuels into or near your well
- when you replace or repair any part of your well system

Identify potential problems as the first step to safeguarding your drinking water. The best way to start is to consult a local expert, someone that knows your area, such as the local health department, agricultural extension agent, a nearby public water system, or a geologist at a local university (See more detailed information below).

Be aware of your surroundings. As you drive around your community, take note of new construction. Check the local newspaper for articles about new construction in your area.

Check the paper or call your local planning or zoning commission for announcements about hearings or zoning appeals on development or industrial projects that could possibly affect your water.

Attend these hearings, ask questions about how your water source is being protected, and don't be satisfied with general answers. Make statements like "If you build this landfill, (just an example) what will you do to ensure that my water will be protected." See how quickly they answer and provide specifics about what plans have been made to specifically address that issue.

Identify Potential Problem Sources

To start your search for potential problems, begin close to home. Do a survey around your well:

- is there livestock nearby?
- are pesticides being used on nearby agricultural crops or nurseries?
- do you use lawn fertilizers near the well?
- is your well "downstream" from your own or a neighbor's septic system?
- is your well located near a road that is frequently salted or sprayed with de-icers during winter months?
- do you or your neighbors dispose of household wastes or used motor oil in the backyard, even in small amounts?

If any of these items apply, it may be best to have your water tested and talk to your local public health department or agricultural extension agent to find way to change some of the practices which can affect your private well.

Also see [**Drinking Water from Household Wells**](#) for more information and help.

In addition to the immediate area around your well, you should be aware of other possible sources of contamination that may already be part of your community or may be moving into your area. Attend any local planning or appeal hearings to find out more about the construction of facilities that may pollute your drinking water. Ask to see the environmental impact statement on the project. See if underground drinking water sources has been addressed. If not, ask why.

Common Sources of Potential Ground

Water Contamination

Category Contaminant Source

Agricultural

- Animal burial areas
- Drainage fields/wells
- Animal feedlots
- Irrigation sites
- Fertilizer storage/use
- Manure spreading areas/pits, lagoons
- Pesticide storage/use

Commercial

- Airports
- Jewelry/metal plating
- Auto repair shops
- Laundromats
- Boatyards
- Medical institutions
- Car washes
- Paint shops
- Construction areas
- Photography establishments
- Cemeteries Process waste water drainage
- Dry cleaners fields/wells
- Gas stations
- Railroad tracks and yards
- Golf courses
- Research laboratories
- Scrap and junkyards
- Storage tanks

Industrial

- Asphalt plants
- Petroleum production/storage
- Chemical manufacture/storage
- Pipelines
- Electronic manufacture
- Process waste water drainage Electroplaters fields/wells
- Foundries/metal fabricators
- Septage lagoons and sludge
- Machine/metalworking shops
- Storage tanks

- Mining and mine drainage
- Toxic and hazardous spills
- Wood preserving facilities

Residential

- Fuel Oil
- Septic systems, cesspools
- Furniture stripping/refinishing
- Sewer lines
- Household hazardous products
- Swimming pools (chemicals)
- Household lawns

Other

- Hazardous waste landfills
- Recycling/reduction facilities
- Municipal incinerators
- Road deicing operations
- Municipal landfills
- Road maintenance depots
- Municipal sewer lines
- Storm water drains/basins/wells
- Open burning sites
- Transfer stations