

Keeping Your Water Safe

The Environmental Protection Agency regulates municipal water systems, but keeping the water in your private well safe is *your* responsibility. Taking the following steps can help:

1. Have your water tested

Well-water should be tested once a year for bacterial contamination, and once every five years for minerals and other concerns. Water should be tested more often under any of the following circumstances:

- someone in the household is pregnant or nursing
- there is unexplained illness in the family
- your neighbors find a contaminant in their well
- there is a change in the taste, color, odor or clarity of your water
- there is a spill of chemicals or fuel near your well
- whenever you repair or replace any part of your system

2. Keep a well file

Keep a file with records about your well, including information about when it was drilled; depth and casing information; and results of any testing or maintenance work that you have done.

3. Check for well safety

- Check the well cap to make sure it is not cracked, broken, or missing
- Check that the well casing is not cracked, corroded or damaged
- Check surface seals to make sure there is no settling or cracking problems
- Slope the area around the well to drain *away* from the well (rainwater can contain bacteria and harmful chemicals that can seep into the well)
- Install a well cap or sanitary seal to prevent anything getting into your well
- Check the area where the electrical line is held to make sure that rodents cannot get in
- Make sure the well casing is at least 12 inches above the surface of the ground
- Hire a certified well driller for any new well construction, modification, abandonment or closure

4. Check for possible sources of contamination

- Avoid mixing or using pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, degreasers, fuels, motor oil or other pollutants near the well
- Do not dispose of wastes in dry or abandoned wells
- Pump and inspect septic systems as often as recommended by your local health department
- Dispose of chemicals, solvents and petroleum products properly (epa.gov/safewater/sourcewater/pubs/fs_fwpp_chemicals)
- Are you downstream from a neighbor's septic system? (or other contaminants)
- Are you near a road that is salted or sprayed with de-icers during the winter months?
- If your well is located near a landfill, storm water drains, burning sites, recycling centers, road maintenance depots or any industrial operations, it is important to check for contaminants often
- Plug abandoned wells (contaminants can get in through well openings and can leach into ground water)

5. Keep your distance – Maintain proper distances between your well and possible sources of contamination. (Distances given are *minimum* amounts)

- Septic tanks—**At least** 50 feet
- Livestock yards, silos, septic leach fields—50 feet (Some county regulations require 100 feet)
- Petroleum tanks, liquid-tight manure storage, fertilizer storage and handling—100 feet
- Manure stacks—250 feet