

How can I protect my private water supply?

Carefully managing activities near the well's water source can protect your water supply, including keeping contaminants away from sinkholes, the well, and septic systems. The following tips can help you protect your water source:

- Periodically inspect exposed parts of the well for problems, such as: cracked, corroded, or damaged well casing; broken or missing well cap; and settling and cracking surface seals.
- Slope the area around the well to drain surface runoff away from the well.
- When landscaping, keep the top of your well at least 18 inches above the ground.
- Be careful when working or mowing around your well. A damaged casing could jeopardize the sanitary protection of your well. Don't pile snow, leaves, or other materials around your well.
- Install a well cap or sanitary seal that prevents animals or other vermin from getting into your well, and that hinders the unauthorized use of, or entry into, the well.
- A sanitary seal or concrete platform should be set around the wellhead to keep pollutants from entering the well bore.
- The well's casing should extend a minimum of 20 feet below the ground surface and preferably be driven at least five feet into bedrock.
- Existing wells in areas with a history of flooding should have the casing elevated at least two feet above the highest known flood level and also should have a watertight sanitary well seal at the top of the grouted casing.
- Disinfect drinking water wells at least once per year with bleach or hypochlorite granules, according to the manufacturers' directions.
- Have the well tested once a year for coliform bacteria, nitrates, and other contaminants of concern. Any source of drinking water should be checked any time there is a change in taste, odor, or appearance, or any time a water supply system is serviced.
- Keep accurate records of any well maintenance, such as dis-infection or sediment removal, that may require the use of chemicals in the well.

- Keep your well records in a safe place. These include the construction report, as well as the annual water well system maintenance and water testing results.
- Hire a certified well driller for any new well construction, modification, or abandonment and closure.
- Avoid mixing or using pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, degreasers, fuels, motor oil, and other pollutants near the well.
- Don't allow back siphonage. When mixing pesticides, fertilizers or other chemicals, don't put the hose inside the tank or container.
- Always maintain proper separation between your well and buildings, waste systems or chemical storage facilities. As a rule of thumb, maintain a minimum of 100 feet between the water source and a subsurface sewage absorption area. But contact a professional well contractor for specific information.
- Do not dispose of wastes in dry wells or in abandoned wells.
- Do not cut off the well casing below the land surface.
- Pump and inspect septic systems as often as recommended by your local health department.
- Never dispose of hazardous materials in a septic system.
- When your well has come to the end of its serviceable life (usually more than 20 years), have your qualified water well contractor properly decommission your well after constructing your new system.