

Be a Responsible Well Owner

Being a private well owner carries a number of responsibilities. Public water system users can depend upon their local government to monitor the quality of water they consume. Private well owners should conduct their own water sampling and maintain their water source.

Protecting the Wellhead

The wellhead is where the well meets the surface of the ground and is capped. As a well owner, you should be familiar with the location of the wellhead and monitor the condition. In nature, the soil removes many contaminants as water moves into the ground. The drilling of a well cuts through the filtering layers and provides a quick path for contaminants to travel to ground water if the well is not properly constructed and maintained. Easy steps to protect the wellhead are:

- Ensure your well has a “sanitary well cap” with a rubber gasket and a screen vent.
- Ensure the casing (the outer wall of the well) extends at least 18 inches above the ground.
- Ensure the ground surface is sloped so water flows away from the top of the well and does not pond near the well.

Keeping a “Well File”

Keeping a “Well File” with all pertinent information to a water system is very important for scheduling maintenance and isolating potential causes if the water quality changes. Well files should include:

- Construction information including the drilling company, total depth, depth to water (this will fluctuate during the seasons of the year), gallons pumped per minute, the geology and the size of the motor.
- Maintenance records should include the work that was done, when and who did the work. Also include any information on maintenance of water treatment system.
- Water quality test results including laboratory reports and data and the cost of testing.

Well Water Quality Testing

To monitor the quality of a water supply, it is essential to regularly sample the well water to detect any changes. Test for nitrates and bacteria every year. It is also a good idea to do a thorough test initially and consider repeating a more comprehensive test every 5 years. Water sampling test kits are available at the North County Annex in Eureka and the County Annex in Libby.

Potential Contaminant Storage

A drawing of a property depicting a well and its surroundings is helpful. In this drawing include the septic tank and drainfield, home, garage, any animal pens, streams, ditches and the slope of the ground. Draw 3 rings around the well at 50, 100 and 250 feet. These rings represent zones where specific potential contaminants should not be located or stored.

- Less than 50 feet: Any sewer line should be outside this zone.
- Less than 100 feet: Leach fields, livestock yards, fuel tanks, pesticides and fertilizer storage should be outside this zone.
- Less than 250 feet: Manure storage piles should be outside this zone.

Sealing Old Wells

Property that has a long history of inhabitants is more likely to have abandoned wells that should be sealed by a professional well driller. Improperly sealed wells pose a large threat to water quality. When searching for an abandoned well, look in small structures and sheds as well as your property in general.



Is your well head protected? The cracked wellhead cap on the left is an easy way to allow pollution into your well. Although the well cap in the middle looks better, it is a non-sanitary version. It provides better protection, but may leak. The sanitary cap on the right provides maximum protection at a slightly higher cost.