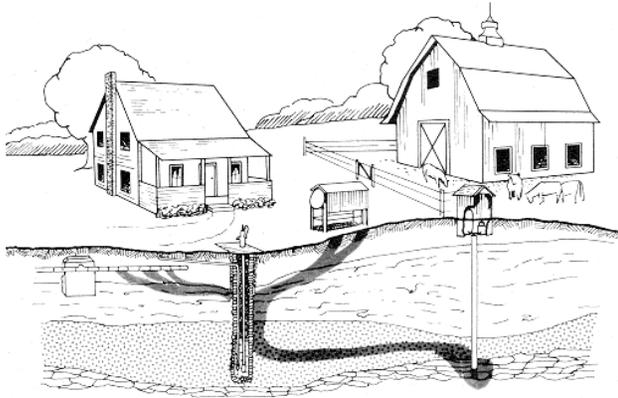


What is an abandoned well - and why is it a problem?

An abandoned well, a well that is *not in use*, can be a potential threat to health, safety, and the environment. Wells that are no longer used, buried or forgotten are often improperly sealed. Sealing is the process of clearing an unused well of debris and filling the well with a special material called *grout*. **Well sealing must be done by a licensed well contractor.**



Unused and improperly sealed wells can be a source of groundwater contamination, potentially affecting nearby drinking water wells, city water wells, or even your own well.

Groundwater provides 100% of the drinking water in Washington County. Protecting groundwater is everybody's business.

How do abandoned wells threaten the groundwater?

Groundwater is found in underground geologic formations called *aquifers*. The layers of rock and soil that lie between an aquifer and the surface, or between aquifers, typically act as natural barriers against the spread of contamination. However, an unused, unsealed well can become a conduit between the surface and an aquifer, or between a shallow aquifer and a deeper aquifer, allowing surface water runoff, contaminated water, or improperly disposed waste to reach an uncontaminated aquifer.

What is a Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA) and an Area of Known Contamination – and why are they a priority?

Abandoned wells in Drinking Water Supply Management Areas and “areas of known contamination” pose a greater risk for groundwater and public health. DWSMAs are surface and subsurface areas surrounding a public water supply well that are managed by public water suppliers. Abandoned wells in DWSMAs pose a high risk for contaminating public drinking water supply areas.

There are also areas in Washington County known to be contaminated by old municipal dumps, industry, and other causes. Abandoned wells in these areas pose a high risk for groundwater contamination by providing a conduit for contaminants to enter lower aquifers.

What does the law require?

By law, a well must be in use, be under a *maintenance permit*, or be sealed by a licensed well contractor. A well must be sealed if: 1) the well is not in use, 2) the well is contaminated, 3) the well has been improperly sealed in the past, 4) the well threatens the quality of the groundwater, or 5) the well otherwise poses a threat to health or safety.



An unused, unsealed well can become a conduit between the surface and groundwater.

Where can I find out more information about wells?

More information about wells and well sealing can be found at the Minnesota Department of Health website:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells/index.html>

*Well sealing information adapted from Minnesota Department of Health materials.