

Key Steps to Protect Your Well

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

- [Test your water](#)
 - [Identify potential problems close to home](#)
 - [Identify potential problems in your community](#)
 - [Consider common sources of potential ground water contamination](#)
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Test your water

Have your water tested annually for total coliform 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. Testing more than once a year may be warranted in some situations, such as:

- 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
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Identify potential problem sources around your well

To start your search for potential problems, do a survey around your well. Some questions you might ask are:

- Are 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?

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.

If any of these items apply, it may be best to:

- Have your water tested
- Talk to your local public health department or agricultural extension agent to find ways to change some of the practices which can affect your private well

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

Identify potential problem sources in your community

In addition to the immediate area around your well, you should be aware of other possible sources of contamination that may:

- Already be in your community
- Be moving into the area

A good place to start may be to consult a local expert who knows your area, such as:

- A local health department official
- An agricultural extension agent
- A nearby public water system official
- A geologist at a local university

Find out about the construction of facilities that may pollute your drinking water. Check the paper for announcements or call your local planning or zoning commission about hearings or zoning appeals on new development, construction or industrial projects. Attend these hearings, planning meetings, or zoning appeals. Ask questions, such as:

- "How is the water source is being protected?" Don't be satisfied with general answers.

- "What will you do to ensure that my water will be protected?" Listen for specifics about what plans have been made to address this.

Ask to see the environmental impact statement on the project. See if protection of 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

Category	Contaminant Source
	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

