

Education and Outreach for Source Protection

Well Abandonment and Testing

Audiences	Key Content
<p>Well owners</p>	<p>If you own a well, you are responsible to maintain it and have it tested regularly, or to close and abandon (plug and seal) it properly. These actions protect you and your neighbours' drinking water sources.</p> <p><u>Abandoning a Well</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wells that have not been properly abandoned can harm our drinking water sources. This risk to our drinking water can be prevented by making sure that unused and unmaintained wells on your property are plugged and sealed correctly. This is the well owner's responsibility. • An improperly abandoned well can hurt your health, harm water sources, and result in enforcement action against you. Specifically, it may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ let bacteria, pesticides, fertilizers and other pollutants into our drinking water sources; ○ allow mineralized water to mix with fresh water; ○ let water escape the well, resulting in property damage, flooding and waste; ○ be a danger to children, adults or animals that can fall into the well and become trapped; and ○ cause damage to farm machinery and vehicles. • Owners who take the proper steps to abandon a well help maintain drinking water sources and may also protect themselves against future costs. • If a well is not being used or maintained for future use as a well, then <u>the Wells Regulation*</u> requires the well owner to plug and seal the well. (*Refers to <u>Regulation 903 made under the Ontario Water Resources Act.</u>) • A new well must be abandoned if it is dry or if construction is not completed.

- If you use your well for drinking water, you must properly plug and seal your well if it:
 - produces mineralized water;
 - produces water that is not potable, unless you contact and follow the advice of your local medical officer of health;
 - contains gas and you do not take steps to prevent a hazard;
 - permits any movement of gas, contaminants or other materials that may harm water sources and you do not take steps to correct the problem; or
 - is not constructed according to the Wells Regulation and you do not take steps to fix the problem or those steps have failed.
- To learn about the measures and steps to abandon a well, the terms “mineralized” and “potable” and the various exemptions see the Technical Bulletin: [“Wells Regulation – Well Abandonment: When to Plug and Seal a Well.”](#)
- Some types of wells are exempt from some of the abandonment requirements in the Wells Regulation. Contact the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change at 1-888-396-9355 to ask about an exemption.
- The equipment, materials and expertise needed to correctly abandon a well and meet the requirements of the Wells Regulation can exceed a well owner’s abilities. There are many serious dangers to consider when working on abandoned wells. Many older wells may collapse. An unused well can contain explosive or poisonous gases. It is strongly recommended that you hire a licensed well contractor who uses licensed well technicians. A directory of licensed well contractors listed by location is available through [Ontario.ca](#).
- Corporations and municipalities must retain the services of a licensed well contractor who employs licensed well technicians to abandon a well, unless exempt. Contact the

Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change at 1-888-396-9355 to ask about exemptions.

- It is the responsibility of the well owner to submit a well record when a water supply well is abandoned except in the following cases.
 - If a new well is dry, then a well purchaser must submit the well record.
 - If a new well is unfinished, then the person constructing the well must submit the well record.
- Further information on who is to submit a well record can be found in Chapter 13 of the Water Supply Wells Manual under "Well Records, Documentation, Reporting."
- Funding is available for proper well abandonment in some areas. Contact your local Conservation Authority or municipality and ask about a well abandonment program.

Well Testing for Bacteria

- You are responsible for wells on your property and should test the water quality in your well at least three times a year. Testing for bacteria is free. Contact your local public health unit for more information.
- Test results are available by telephone within 48 hours of a sample being submitted. The result will tell the private well owner if the water is safe to drink. Public Health Inspectors can help you understand the test results and work with you to fix any problems if they are detected.
- The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care encourages public health units to monitor local test results from private wells to identify trends and education needs, and to help protect water sources.
- Information on testing your well for bacteria can be found in Chapter 11 of the Water Supply Wells manual, under "Testing the Water."

	<p><u>Well Testing for Chemicals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <u>Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network</u> provides information online about groundwater levels and chemistry conditions. • Information on testing your well for chemicals can be found in Chapter 11 of the Water Supply Wells manual, under <u>“Testing the Water.”</u> <p><u>Well Water Quality Concerns</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may receive a letter and/or visit from the public health unit and be asked for a sample from your drinking water if there is a concern about water sources in your area. • If you are concerned about well water quality in your area, contact your local <u>public health unit</u> or the nearest <u>Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Regional or District Office</u>. • If you have questions about maintaining or abandoning your well contact the <u>Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Wells Helpdesk</u> at 1-888-396-9355 or wellshelpdesk@ontario.ca.
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RESOURCES

The following resources may be helpful for well owners.

WELLS REGULATION	
Link	<u>Regulation 903 made under the Ontario Water Resources Act (the Wells Regulation)</u>
Author	Government of Ontario
Date Published	Last updated January 2014
Notes	Provides minimum standards for wells, including when and how to abandon a well.

REGIONAL AND DISTRICT OFFICES, ONTARIO MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE	
Link	<u>Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Regional and District Offices</u>
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	N/A
Notes	Contact if you have a concern about water quality in your area.
ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS	
Link	<u>Public Health Units</u>
Author	Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Date Published	N/A
Notes	Links to Ontario public health units listed by location. Contact your local public health unit to get free bacterial water testing and to determine if your sample shows your water is safe for human consumption or bathing.
WELLS HELP DESK	
Link	<u>Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, Well Records</u>
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	N/A
Notes	Call the dedicated help desk for answers to questions on wells abandonment, maintenance and records. 1-888-396-WELL (9355) Wells Help Desk Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Branch Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change 125 Resources Road, Toronto, ON M9P 3V6
DIRECTORY OF LICENSED WELL CONTRACTORS	
Link	<u>Ontario.ca</u>
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	N/A
Notes	Directory of licensed well contractors searchable by location.

CONSERVATION ONTARIO	
Link	ConservationOntario.on.ca
Author	Conservation Ontario
Date Published	N/A
Notes	Listing of local conservation authorities. Contact your local conservation authority to find out if funding to abandon a well is available in your area through the Rural Clean Water Program.
WELLS ON YOUR PROPERTY	
Link	Wells on your property
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	Updated August 2014
Notes	Information for residential well owners on the proper location, construction, maintenance and abandonment of a well.
WELLS REGULATION – WELL ABANDONMENT: <u>HOW</u> TO PLUG AND SEAL A WELL (TECHNICAL BULLETIN)	
Link	Wells Regulation – Well Abandonment: How to Plug and Seal a Well (technical bulletin)
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	April 2011
Notes	Information on how to abandon a well. This technical bulletin is one in a series of 11 on well issues created for well owners.
WELLS REGULATION – WELL ABANDONMENT: <u>WHEN</u> TO PLUG AND SEAL A WELL (TECHNICAL BULLETIN)	
Link	Wells Regulation – Well Abandonment: When to Plug and Seal a Well (technical bulletin)
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	April 2011
Notes	Information on when to abandon a well. This technical bulletin is one in a series of 11 on well issues created for well owners.

WATER SUPPLY WELLS: REQUIREMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES (MANUAL)	
Link	<u>Water Supply Wells: Requirements and Best Practices</u>
Author	Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Date Published	December 2009
Notes	Helps a person constructing a well to go beyond the minimum standards set by the Wells Regulation.
PROVINCIAL GROUNDWATER MONITORING NETWORK	
Link	<u>Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network</u>
Author	Government of Ontario
Date Published	Ongoing updates
Notes	Provides information on groundwater levels and chemistry conditions for 360 Ontario wells.

OTHER INFORMATION

For inquiries about this information sheet contact:

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