

Citizen's Guide to the Michigan Wellhead Protection Program



Adopted from
Michigan Rural Water Association's
Source Water Protection Program Article Series

1.5

PROTECT YOUR DRINKING WATER: PLUG ABANDONED WELLS

WHAT IS AN ABANDONED WELL?

A well which:

- has its use permanently discontinued.
- is in such disrepair that its continued use for obtaining groundwater is impractical.
- has been left uncompleted.
- is a threat to groundwater resources or may be a health or safety hazard.



DANGERS OF UNPLUGGED ABANDONED WELLS

Safety Hazard. Each year the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) receives reports of people, mostly children, falling into old wells. Injury or death may result.

Health Hazard. Abandoned wells act as conduits for contaminants to move from the surface into deeper aquifers. Drinking water contamination has been caused by abandoned wells.

Environmental Hazard. Deteriorated well casings or open, uncased boreholes allow movement of water between previously separated aquifers. This can degrade water quality. Abandoned wells have also been used for illegal dumping of waste.

HOW TO LOCATE ABANDONED WELLS

- ✓ Search for water well drilling logs or old billing statements that show well depth and well location.
- ✓ Information can be found by contacting (a) the contractor who drilled or serviced the well, (b) the local health department, or (c) the MDEQ, Geological Survey Division in Lansing.
- ✓ If there are no records available for your well, look for the following:
 - Pipes sticking out of the ground.
 - Electrical switch boxes out in the yard.
 - Old crock, brick or stone structures.
 - Pipes sticking through walls or floors in the basement.
 - Cement pits in and under sheds.
 - Windmills or old hand pumps.
- ✓ Metal detectors may be used for locating buried wells:
 - First, locate where the old water line exited the home or building.
 - From this point, survey the ground with the metal detector moving away from the structure.
 - Use a marker to designate the location of any readings you get.
 - Well casings are typically 4 to 5 feet below grade and are located between 5 and 25 feet from your home.

Property owners are responsible for plugging abandoned wells on their property.

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