



Nevada Division of Environmental Protection Bureau of Water Pollution Control

Abandoning Unused Water Wells FACT SHEET

If you don't use your well, why should you plug it?

Unplugged abandoned wells can come back to haunt you and your water supply. Every year, many wells are abandoned when they are replaced with new wells or when homes are connected to community water systems. When an abandoned well is improperly plugged, or not plugged at all, it can be a hazard to safety and health.

Unplugged abandoned wells may provide a direct path from the land surface to ground water. When they are not properly plugged, pesticides, fertilizers, and other contaminants have an easy path straight to your ground water. If the well is open, you also run the risk of children, animals and others falling into it. You may be held liable for their injuries. Also, you may be held liable for any illegal dumping done without your knowledge, or for mischievous acts and pranks committed to your well.

Another reason for properly abandoning your well is that the State of Nevada, Division of Water Resources, has adopted regulations that require the plugging of water wells. The regulations require that water wells be plugged by a licensed well driller. The well casing has to be removed, perforated or ripped, depending on the geological conditions of the site. The plugging has to be done by filling the drill hole with neat cement or a bentonite product. After the well has been properly plugged, the driller then makes a report in writing to the Division of Water Resources. It is important to point out that property owners are responsible for proper well abandonment.

What if there is an abandoned well on my property and I don't know about it?

Abandoned wells are not always in clear sight. To find out if there is one on your property, try contacting the following sources.

- Former property owners or neighbors, who may remember well locations.
- Well drillers, who may be able to say where they drilled a well no longer in use.
- Old photos, which may show windmills, houses, barns, or other buildings where wells might be found.
- Fire insurance plan drawings, which might contain records of old wells.
- Government agencies or surveys, such as the State Division of Water Resources, Conservation Districts, Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, U.S. Geological Survey, and Irrigation Districts.

Can I get financial assistance for plugging unused wells on my property?

There are some sources of financial assistance available in different forms - grants, loans or a combination of both.

-The State Revolving Fund provides loans (and other forms of financial assistance) with interest at or below the market rate, to assist municipalities or other public entities in projects to control water pollution. The entity also has to write a description of the project, including design, construction drawings and specifications. The Division of Environmental Protection, Office of Financial Assistance, reviews the document and, upon approval, executes the contract. For more information, please contact the Office of Financial Assistance, (775) 687-9488.

-The State Revolving Fund also offers non-match grants for the development and implementation of local wellhead protection programs. The Division of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Water Pollution Control, is the lead agency for the Nevada Wellhead Protection Program. For more information, please contact the Bureau of Water Pollution Control, (775) 687-9426.

-Section 319 of the Clean Water Act 1987 Amendments provides for funds, which require a 50% local match, for projects that improve water quality. Under this provision, community entities (as opposed to individuals), apply to the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP), Bureau of Water Quality Planning, with a written proposal describing their project. The community entities can be, for example, GIDs (General Improvement Districts) or Home Owner Associations. The Bureau then reviews all the proposals received, prioritizes them, and awards the funds appropriately. For more information, please contact the Bureau of Water Quality Planning, (775) 687-9550.

-The Nevada State Office for Rural Economic and Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture has loans and grants available to eligible individuals (as opposed to entities) to assist in sealing unused wells. The only areas in Nevada where these programs are not available are Reno, Sparks, Las Vegas, Carson City, and South Lake Tahoe. Also, there are restrictions in terms of

household income, but these vary according to size of family and county of residence. For further information, please inquire as follows:

For the counties of Churchill, Douglas, Lyon, Mineral, Storey, and Washoe, please contact:

William Brewer,
USDA Rural Development
1390 S. Curry Street
Carson City, NV 89703
(775) 887-1222, ext. 13

For the counties of Clark, Esmeralda, Lincoln, Nye, please contact:

Kevin McAllister
USDA Rural Development, Field Office
5820 S. Pecos Road, Building A, Suite 400
Las Vegas, NV 89120
(702) 262-9047, ext. 112

For the counties of Elko, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Pershing, and White Pine, please contact:

Thomas Stephens
USDA Rural Development, Field Office
555 W. Silver Street, Suite 101
Elko, NV 89801
(775) 738-8468, ext. 110

How can I get more Information?

If you would like to obtain more information about Properly Abandoning Wells, please contact the Division of Water Resources, at (775) 687-3861.

If you are interested in finding out more about protecting your ground water, you can contact the Bureau of Water Pollution Control, at (775) 687-9426.

If you have any other water quality questions, you can contact the Bureau of Water Quality Planning, at (775) 687-9448.