Over 3 million people in Pennsylvania get their water from a private water system (well, spring, or cistern). Families on private water supplies, need to be aware of changing water quality issues and the best methods to protect their water supply.

Unlike public drinking water systems, homeowners with private wells do not have assistance with the management of their water supply (including routine maintenance, water testing, and solving water quality and quantity problems). All private water system owners need to take the time to make sure everything is working correctly and ensure that their water is always healthy to drink.

For more information on proper management of private water systems, contact a Penn State Cooperative Extension educator or become part of the Master Well Owner Network today!

Other Sources of Information

Master Well Owner Network
http://mwon.cas.psu.edu

Penn State Water Resources Extension
www.sfr.cas.psu.edu/water

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Safe Drinking Water Hotline
www.epa.gov/safewater or 1800-426-4791

Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water
www.epa.gov/ogwdw/

PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgmt/WSM/WSM.HTM

National Ground Water Association (NGWA)
www.ngwa.org

Pennsylvania Ground Water Association (PGWA)
www.pgwa.org
www.wellowner.org

Keep Good Records

Well record books are a great way to keep track of your well installation, maintenance, inspections, repairs, and water tests. Having this log of activity will assist the owner of the well in detecting problems early and noticing changes over time. If something does go wrong, contact a local expert and show them your well’s records for a diagnosis. Well record books can also be helpful to any future owners of your home.

What is the Master Well Owner Network?

It is a program designed to train 240 volunteers throughout Pennsylvania about private water system management. If you are the owner of a private water system and/or you are interested in educating others in your community, become part of the network. Call us at 814-865-2250 or email mwon@psu.edu.

http://mwon.cas.psu.edu

Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its workforce
The results of your water test(s) will tell you the level at which each of the tested substances were found in your water supply. The presence of any specific substance does not necessarily indicate a danger to your health. Comparing your results to the state or federal drinking water standards will help you to determine how problematic your results really are to the safety of your family. For information on safe drinking water standards, contact your county’s Penn State Cooperative Extension office.

In Pennsylvania, there are no state regulations that require private well owners to maintain their well or test their drinking water. Improperly constructed or poorly maintained wells can create a pathway for pollutants into your home drinking water. The owner of a private water well may be the only line of defense against contamination of that water supply. Preventing contaminated water supplies protects the health of you and your family, and it is also less expensive and easier than fixing a water quality problem after it has already occurred. Learning about proper well maintenance is your best line of defense against a polluted water source.

Why Protect Your Private Well?

Test Your Water

To ensure that your drinking water is healthy, have your water tested every year. There are many tests that can be done on your water and having all of them done is usually not necessary. It is a good idea to have your water tested annually for coliform bacteria and every three years for pH and total dissolved solids. However, if you can determine what potential contaminants are threats to your water supply, you can more carefully select the type of tests and analysis that you will need done to ensure the safety of your water. Have your water tested by a certified laboratory. If you have questions about what to test your water for or if you want to locate a local certified testing lab, contact your county’s Extension Educator. It is also important to test the water in a home with a private well before purchase.

Potential Contaminants

Regular Tests For...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Test For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Coliform Bacteria</td>
<td>- test every year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Dissolved Solids</td>
<td>- test every 3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Tests for Specific Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Test For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gastro-intestinal illness</td>
<td>coliform bacteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloudy or colored water</td>
<td>detergents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange or black stains</td>
<td>iron, manganese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap has no lather, white residue</td>
<td>hardness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water tastes salty</td>
<td>chloride, sodium, TDS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odor of gas or fuel</td>
<td>VOCs**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin hole leaks, bluish stains</td>
<td>pH, copper, lead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearby Landuse

Agricultural operations

Coal mining

Gas drilling

Dump, landfill, or factory

Heavily salted roadways

Interpreting Your Water Tests

The results of your water test(s) will tell you the level at which each of the tested substances were found in your water supply. The presence of any specific substance does not necessarily indicate a danger to your health. Comparing your results to the state or federal drinking water standards will help you to determine how problematic your results really are to the safety of your family. For information on safe drinking water standards, contact your county’s Penn State Cooperative Extension office.

Inspect Your Well

Every year, homeowners should do a thorough inspection of their home water well.

- Keep the area around your well clean and make sure it is always accessible.

- Limit activities such as use of fertilizers or pesticides near the well.

- Be aware of local activities that may impact your well water.

- Complete a visual inspection of your well casing to detect any cracks, holes, or corrosion.

- Replace a standard well cap with a sanitary well cap to keep out insects, small mammals, and other surface contamination.

- Check the wiring for the pump to make sure that it is secured in an electric conduit pipe.

- If you have not taken measures to prevent backflow, contact a plumbing supplier and take advantage of backflow prevention devices that are inexpensive.

Maintaining your well is essential to protecting your family’s health on a day to day basis. However, even with proper annual maintenance, well materials and equipment will eventually need replacement. For preventative maintenance, get your well inspected at least every ten years by a qualified professional.