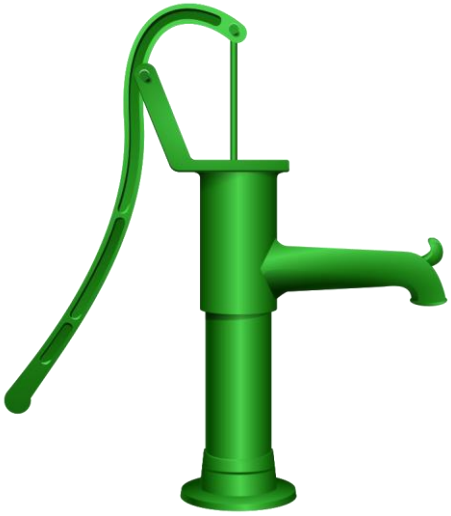
Well Abandonment Projects & Cost Sharing Information



Fond du Lac County

Land & Water Conservation Department

What is Cost Sharing?

Cost sharing assists landowners financially with the costs of conservation projects. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Fond du Lac County Land & Water Conservation Department both offer cost sharing for well abandonment projects.

For more information about cost sharing through the Fond du Lac County Land & Water Conservation Department contact us at (920) 906-4680 or go to our website at http://www.fdlco.wi.gov/departments/departments-f-m/land-and-water-conservation/well-abandonment

For more information about the cost sharing offered through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources contact the Drinking Water & Groundwater Program Manager at (608) 266-8697 or go to the DNR website at http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wells/fillingsealing.html

An old hand pump over a dug well.

Why Should I Properly Abandon My Old Well?

Old or unused wells that are not properly abandoned can pose a significant risk to ground water quality. Wells that are left open and unused are at risk of having contaminants drain down into them and into the ground water system. Old drilled wells can develop cracks in the steel casing that can let contaminants through. Older dug wells were often lined with brick or field stone that does not provide a good barrier to prevent contaminants from reaching ground water.

Once contaminants reach the ground water it is difficult, if not impossible to remove them. Contaminated ground water often does not just effect a single well but can effect the water quality in other wells nearby.

Old and unused wells pose a safety hazard as well. Older dug wells can be up to 6 feet across and 50 feet deep or even deeper. Serious injury or worse could result if someone or a pet accidentally fell down into an old well.

How Do I Get Started?

First, contact a licensed well driller or pump installer to inspect the well and request a written estimate for abandoning the well. All well abandonment projects are required to be completed by a licensed well driller or pump installer. Improperly abandoned wells could result in contamination of ground water resources as well as other nearby wells making them unsuitable for drinking.

There are two types of private drinking water wells commonly found in Fond du Lac County: dug wells & drilled wells.

Old dug wells are commonly about 4 feet in diameter and can vary in depth but are usually not deeper than 50 feet. They are usually lined with field stone or brick. The well driller will need to remove the cover and remove all obstructions in the well to make sure good placement of fill material is achieved. Drillers and pump installers also need to make sure that a drilled well is not present in the bottom of the dug well. If so, that will need to be properly filled before the dug well is filled in.

To properly abandon dug wells, the well can be filled in with clean clay, silt, clean native clay or silt-type soil (if compacted), concrete, sand-cement grout or bentonite chips. Well Drillers will commonly have excavators with heavy equipment knock in the top 5 feet of the well and place the fill material to abandon these wells.

Extreme caution should be used around dug wells to avoid injury from falling down into the well.

Drilled wells can commonly vary from 4” to 6” in diameter and vary in depth depending on the location. Drilled wells have a steel sleeve called a “casing” that helps to protect the well from contaminants seeping down into it.

Typically, bentonite chips are used for filling in drilled wells. However, neat cement grout, concrete, sand cement grout can also be used.

Bentonite chips come in 50 pound bags and are poured out over a screen to keep bentonite dust called “fines” out of the well. A well driller or pump installer pours the bentonite slowly down into the well to make sure it doesn't “bridge” and allow gaps to occur. Once the well is filled, moisture will cause the bentonite chips to seal the well. The casing can be cut off below the ground surface and either seeded or landscaped over.

A DNR Well Abandonment Report (form #3300-005) must be completed. Be sure to get a copy for your records. It will also be required if you are receiving any cost sharing.

Well driller pouring bentonite chips into a drilled well to properly abandon the well.

Fond du Lac County Land & Water Conservation Dept.

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