



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – WELL ABANDONMENT

#### Q1. What is meant by the term well abandonment?

The proper abandonment of a private well involves more than no longer using the well or simply covering the well casing (metal pipe) and ignoring it. Technically, the term **well abandonment** refers to the filling and sealing of an unused well with an approved, impermeable material such as bentonite chips, concrete, or neat cement. Unused and improperly abandoned wells pose a significant threat to groundwater, the source of Madison's drinking water supply. This threat is especially serious for non-abandoned wells located within the vicinity of a municipal well. More information is available on the DNR [website](#).

#### Q2. Why should I abandon my unused or non-complying private wells?

For one, the Madison General Ordinances ([Chapter 13.21](#)) require it. Domestic wells represent potential conduits or direct pathways for surface contaminants to reach the groundwater supply. If your property is in a wellhead protection area, an area within 1200 feet of a municipal well, groundwater contamination at your well will show up in the municipal water supply. Holes in the basement floor can easily be mistaken as drains for the sewer system. Proper abandonment of an unused well avoids the possibility of contamination by closing and sealing the connection between the land surface and the groundwater below our feet.

#### Q3. What are the requirements for the proper abandonment of a well?

As of June 1, 2008, only licensed well drillers and pump installers can fill and seal wells under Wisconsin law. These licensed professionals must follow the regulations codified in Wisconsin Administrative Code, Chapter NR 812. In addition, Water Utility staff must be on site for any well abandonment performed in the City of Madison. Please contact the utility at least 48 hours before scheduling to abandon your well. A list of licensed well drillers and pump installers is available on the DNR [website](#).

#### Q4. What should I do if I find evidence of a potential unused well on my property?

Please contact Madison Water Utility at 266-4654 or [water@cityofmadison.com](mailto:water@cityofmadison.com) if there is any evidence of an unused or non-abandoned well on your property, or you have reason to believe one may exist. If you are not sure, Water Utility staff can perform a short, complimentary inspection. You will be required to abandon the well if the presence of one is confirmed.

Q5. What does it cost to properly abandon a private well?

The cost of a well abandonment depends on a number of factors, the primary ones being depth of the well and whether the pump is present and needs to be pulled. A “typical” abandonment costs \$500-\$1000 but may be more or less depending on the well depth and ease with which the pump can be removed. Well drillers typically charge by the foot so deeper wells are more expensive to abandon than shallow ones.

Q6. Is any financial assistance available to help pay for the well abandonment?

As of January 2010, the City of Madison may reimburse a property owner 50% of the cost, up to \$1000, to abandon a private well. Program details are available on the Water Utility [website](#) or by calling the utility at 266-4654.

Financial assistance also may be available through the Department of Natural Resources. The department offers a limited number of grants to help pay for the abandonment of unused private wells. Applicants must not exceed income thresholds to qualify. In addition, you must apply for the grant **before** any work is completed. More information can be found on the DNR [website](#) or by calling the department at 266-8697 or 267-7152.

Q7. Are private wells allowed in the City of Madison?

According to city and state code, unused private wells must be abandoned. However, private domestic wells are permissible in the City of Madison as long as the following criteria for the issuance of a well operation permit are satisfied. Permits are issued by the Water Utility.

- (1) The well and pump installation must satisfy the requirements of Chapter NR 812 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code.
- (2) The well must produce bacteriologically safe water; that is, the water must be free of coliform bacteria including *E. coli*.
- (3) The well must not be cross-connected to the municipal water system.