

Do's & Don'ts: Protecting Your Wellhead and Drinking Water Supply

Maine CDC Drinking Water Program • 11 SHS Augusta, ME 04330 • 287-2070 • www.medwp.com

Drinking water supplied by wells comes from groundwater and is influenced by what happens on the land around the well. Many land uses and everyday activities can cause pollution and contaminate our drinking water supplies. Whether you own and operate a public water system, are a neighbor to one, or have your own well, there are actions you can take to help protect the well and keep our drinking water safe.

To achieve better wellhead protection, you should:

- **Familiarize** yourself with the established protection areas around the well;
- **Practice** good management procedures;
- **Examine** activities around the well;
- **Talk** with municipal officials; and
- **Educate** staff and water users about the importance of clean water.

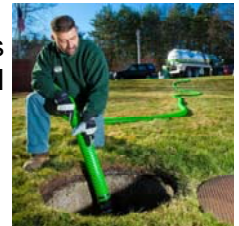


Consider the following to ensure protection of your drinking water supply:

Septic systems

Septic systems are one of the biggest threats to water supplies. The waste from homes and businesses enters septic systems and is discharged into the ground water. How well your septic system is able to handle waste depends on proper maintenance and upkeep.

- **DO** have your septic tank pumped every three to five years.
- **DO** check for signs that your septic system is not working properly such as smell, flushing and plumbing issues, greener grass, and/or standing water.
- **DO** keep standing or pooling water away from your septic system.
- **DON'T** flush or pour chemicals down the drain.
- **DON'T** use your toilet as a trash can. Disposing of non-biodegradable things and hazardous chemicals can damage your septic system and impact ground water.



Fuel use and storage

Oil and gasoline are necessities, however, these substances also pose a threat to water supply wells. Even a small amount of oil or gasoline that leaks or spills onto the ground can pollute a water supply well. For this reason, it is especially important to prevent leaks and spills. It is much less costly to prevent a spill than it is to clean up a contaminated drinking water supply.

- **DO** handle gasoline and used motor oil carefully, clean up any spills immediately, and dispose of these materials at a recycling center
- **DO** report any oil or gasoline spills at or near your property as soon as possible to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection by calling their Spill Report number **1-800-482-0777**.
- **DO** inspect your heating oil tank and its piping to make sure it's not leaking, starting to corrode or in danger of tipping over.
- **DON'T** store oil or gasoline near your well. Store these materials safely and as far away from your well as possible.



Safe storage means storing materials in sealed containers that are not easily punctured. Secondary containment is strongly recommended. Store all contaminants outside of the wellhead protection area.



Keep Your Drinking Water Safe:

✓ Protect Your Source

✓ Take Your Samples

✓ Maintain Your Treatment

✓ Inspect Your Pipes & Tanks

Household chemicals

Household chemicals can contaminate your well if they are not properly handled. The care you take in handling, using, and properly disposing of these products can have a big impact on how well your water supply is protected.

- **DO** store chemicals in a safe place, away from your well.
- **DO** read labels and dispose of chemicals properly. Take notice of when your community has hazardous waste collection days.
- **DO** look for less toxic, environmentally friendly alternatives.
- **DO** clean up any spills of leaks right away and notify the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at **1-800-452-4664**.



- **DON'T** pour chemicals on the ground, into sewer or septic systems, or put them in your trash. This is how ground water becomes contaminated.

Yard maintenance and animal care

Many of us take pride in maintaining our lawns, yards, and gardens. However, the chemicals that we use in our maintenance can have negative impacts on our drinking water supplies.



- **DO** use fertilizers and pesticides carefully (or not at all) and not within your wellhead protection area. If you do use these chemicals, be sure to use them at the proper application rate and don't use them near your well.
- **DO** store fertilizers and pesticides safely and as far away from your well as possible.
- **DO** look for alternatives before you decide to apply fertilizers or pesticides. There may be specific plants or gardening techniques you can use to help prevent pests and weed problems without the use of chemicals.
- **DO** keep pets and livestock (kennels, dog runs, pastures, feedlots) away from your well. Runoff from pet and livestock waste can pollute a well.
- **DO** keep manure piles covered and store them on an impervious surface (such as a cement slab) to help minimize runoff and seepage into the ground.

Your neighbors

You can do a lot through your own activities to maximize the source protection of your drinking water well. Your neighbors, if they are within your wellhead protection area, can also have an impact on your well. To ensure protection of your well, it is important to work with your neighbors so that they are aware of the ways their actions may impact your well.

- **DO** talk with your neighbors so they are aware of your drinking water well, its location, and the actions that can pollute a drinking water well.
- **DO** encourage your neighbors to take care of their septic tanks, petroleum, and chemicals.
- **DO** consider obtaining a protective covenant, easement, or ordinance within your wellhead protection area to limit the activities and land uses that can occur around your well. For more information visit our website, www.medwp.com > Public Water Systems > Source Water Protection > Templates and Guidance > Best Management Practices for Groundwater Protection.



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