

ABANDONED WELLS

It is fairly common in Washington State to find old wells which are no longer in use. These are called “abandoned” wells.

Abandoned wells can pose safety and environmental problems. The most dangerous type of abandoned well is the shallow dug type. Properly closing these and any other wells is called decommissioning. Abandoned wells are required to be decommissioned as soon as possible. There are several ways to decommission a well.

What are the specific dangers that abandoned wells cause?



Perhaps the greatest danger is the risk of injury or death to people and animals that fall into the well.

Abandoned wells also act as direct paths for

contaminants to reach groundwater.

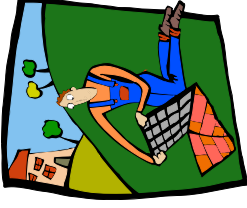
Contaminants entering groundwater through the well may harm the quality of the water you and your neighbors drink.

Washington law holds the landowner responsible for decommissioning abandoned wells. The landowner is responsible for any injury or occurrence of contamination caused by

an abandoned well not properly decommissioned.

How do I find abandoned wells?

Knowing the history of the property may help you decide where to look for abandoned wells. It is not uncommon to find as many as three or four such wells on some properties.



Since the history of the well is not always known, here are some things you may look for when searching for abandoned wells:

- Pipes sticking out of the ground
- Old well houses
- Depressions in the earth
- Concrete vaults, pits, or tile
- Old plywood lying on the ground or over concrete tile or vaults

Wells were also often located in basements of houses, under porch steps, or near cisterns and windmills.

Remember, even though an abandoned well may no longer contain water, it can still create safety and/or environmental problems.

If you need this document in a format for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872. Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

What should I do when I decide to close down a well?

You will need to contact a licensed well driller to decommission a well. Washington law requires all wells be decommissioned by a licensed driller. A licensed driller will have experience with well construction and decommissioning materials and methods. They also know about the local geology. All of this knowledge is necessary to safely and properly close a well.

Costs to decommission wells will vary depending on the depth, diameter, and geology of the area. Special equipment may be required to remove old pumps and pipes from the well.

You will need to send in a “Notice of Intent to Decommission a Well” to the Department of Ecology at least 72 hours in advance of the work. There



is also a \$50 fee to decommission a water well. Check with your local county offices to see if there are any other special requirements.

For information on decommissioning standards, see Chapter 173-160 WAC.