

## New Pierce County Process for Meeting Exempt Well Requirements

### What Changed and When?

Effective Nov. 1, 2016, Pierce County Planning and Land Service (PALS) established a new [county-wide policy](#) for building permit and subdivision applications that propose using permit-exempt wells as a potable water source. Under the new policy, PALS must determine whether there is sufficient water available to support the building or subdivision proposal based on the findings of a required Hydrogeologic Study. PALS requires the applicant to conduct the study. The study must demonstrate that the new well will not impact or impair:

- Senior water rights; or
- Established in-stream flows and closures identified on this [county map](#).

### Why Did the Process Change?

PALS implemented the new policy in response to a Washington State Supreme Court Decision ([Whatcom County v. Hirst](#)). In the Hirst decision, the Supreme Court ruled that counties must determine whether water is factually and legally available before approving development that relies on permit-exempt wells. In the past, such wells did not require a hydrogeologic assessment of water availability prior to issuing a building permit or subdivision approval.

### What If I Submitted a Well Application Prior to Nov. 1, 2016?

The County's new policy does not apply to permit exempt well applications that were received prior to Nov. 1, 2016. The Health Department will review well applications received prior to Nov. 1, 2016 on a first come, first serve basis and will not require a determination of water availability from PALS.

### How Does This Apply to Land Division Proposals?

The new PALS policy applies unless you have already received written approval from the Health Department to drill your well.

### When Can I Submit My Well Application to the Health Department?

You can submit an application at any time. We will review and provide feedback on well applications, but will not issue a well site approval until you have complied with PALS' new requirements and PALS has made a determination of your water availability.

### Who Can Complete a Hydrogeologic Study and How Much Does it Cost?

A licensed Washington State Hydrogeologist must complete the Study. A hydrogeologic study cost depends on your location and whether other studies have been completed in your area.

## What Resources are Available for More Information?

PALS staff: [Cory Ragan](#) (253) 798-2590  
[Michael Jimenez](#) (253) 798-7181

PALS website: [New Permit Exempt Wells](#)