

## **What Do I Need to Know About Plugging An Abandoned Water Well ?**

Groundwater from aquifers supplies over half of the water used in the state. With water being one of our state's most precious natural resources, we must all take responsibility for protecting it.

For many years groundwater has been pumped through water wells. Over time, these wells can deteriorate or not be in use and therefore considered abandoned. It is estimated that 150,000 abandoned water wells exist in the state of Texas. These abandoned water wells are not only a route for possible contaminants to enter our groundwater supplies, but they are also a safety hazard to children and animals.

Contaminants that enter a well are introduced directly into the aquifer because they are not naturally filtered by soils or geologic materials. If a concentrated chemical enters a well, it may reach levels in the underlying aquifer that threaten human health. This puts other wells in the aquifer at risk, particularly those that are close to the abandoned well. If your well is a deteriorated well it must be properly abandoned and can not be capped. A deteriorated well is a well that, because of its condition, will cause or is likely to cause pollution of any water in this state, including groundwater. In certain cases the contaminated water can even migrate to other aquifers, putting additional water wells at risk.

According to Texas law, a water well is considered abandoned if it is not in use. However, a non-deteriorated well can be considered in use if it contains a casing, pump, and pump column in good condition or if it has been capped.

The landowner may plug any well located on their own property. If the well is not plugged by the landowner then it must be plugged by a licensed water well driller or pump installer. Before any work is done, the landowner is encouraged to contact the Water Well Drillers and Pump Installers Program of the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) at <http://www.tdlr.texas.gov/wwd/wwd.htm> and get a plugging method approved. Prior to plugging a well located on their property, the landowner should consult the *Landowner's Guide to Plugging Abandoned Water Wells* (TCEQ publication RG-347, <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/rg/rg-347.html>). If the well does not fall within the requirements listed in RG-347, licensed water well drillers or licensed pump installers can legally plug the well.

If the well is within a Groundwater Conservation District (GCD or "district"), the landowner must notify the district of their intention to plug the well, request the district's plugging application, and pay applicable fees if required.

Within 30 days after the well is plugged, a copy of the well-plugging form should be sent to the TDLR and the local GCD. The plugging report can be filed online (see <http://www.tdlr.texas.gov/wwd/wwdfaq.htm#a6> for details); however, the landowner will need to contact TDLR for a user ID and Password first.

The basic steps to plugging an abandoned well are:

- Determine the size of the well;
- Remove debris from the well;
- Disinfect the well to ensure that disease-causing microorganisms are not sealed in the aquifer;
- Remove all removable casing;
- Fill the well with plugging material; and,
- Complete and mail the state plugging form to the TDLR.

Some areas of Texas have assistance programs for plugging abandoned wells. The landowner may contact their local GCD representative at <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/groundwater/districts.html> or <http://www.texasgroundwater.org/>, as well as their Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board representative at <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/regionaloffices>, to see if a program is available in their area. The Texas Groundwater Protection Committee (TGPC) has created an online map of GCDs with abandoned water well Cost Share Plugging Programs available at <http://tgpc.state.tx.us/water-wells/#7>.

Further information about plugging abandoned wells is available by contacting a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agent at <http://counties.agrilife.org/>, the local GCD at <http://www.texasgroundwater.org/resources/gcdi.html>, or the TDLR.

For additional Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) related to groundwater quantity, groundwater quality, septic systems, water wells, administrative entities, and publications, visit the TGPC's FAQ webpage at <http://tgpc.state.tx.us/frequently-asked-questions-faqs/>.