



News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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Abandoned Wells Must Be Sealed

The Somerset County Department of Health would like to remind homeowners and business owners about the importance of sealing abandoned wells on their property. If a well is no longer used for any reason, it is considered abandoned and must be sealed properly.

Residents and businesses in Somerset County use wells for a variety of services, from a private drinking-water supply to irrigation to industrial production. Sealing wells prevents personal injury due to accidents and contamination of the underlying aquifer. Bored and hand-dug wells, which have larger diameters, can be large enough to trap a child, pets or small farm animals.

Surface contamination such as rain-water runoff can enter into the ground-water supply directly from an abandoned well. Layers of soil or rock naturally filter out most contaminants, such as bacteria and chemicals. However, this natural protection is compromised when a well opening is not properly sealed. When contaminants enter into the underlying aquifer, not only can it contaminate the water source for neighbors on private wells, but it also can affect larger city water systems that rely on ground water as a potable water source.

Modern well systems are easier to identify due to required state construction regulations. For example, the well head must be 12 inches above the ground. Older wells may be harder to recognize as they may be located in pits or vaults, in basements of older buildings, hidden under grass or buried underground.

The responsibility of sealing an abandoned well rests with the property owner. If not closed properly, accidents can represent both a legal and environmental liability. In the state of New Jersey, an abandoned well must be sealed by a licensed well driller and permits may be required before work begins.

Contact your local health department for the most up-to-date information on local-permit requirements. For a listing of local health departments, visit the Somerset County Department of Health's website at www.co.somerset.nj.us/health/localhealth.htm.

For additional information regarding state permitting and names of licensed well drillers, contact the Somerset County Department of Health at (908) 231-7155 or the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Water Supply at (609) 984-6831 or visit their website at www.nj.gov/dep/watersupply.

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