

Water Well Abandonment

This fact sheet provides general public health information about proper water well abandonment, and was developed for environmental health education.

What is an abandoned well?

An “abandoned well” is a water well or borehole that is no longer in use, that is unable to produce useable water, or is unable to be used because of poor maintenance or significant wear and tear.

Wells are “temporarily abandoned” if they remain unused for a minimum 365 days, or “permanently abandoned” if use is interrupted for more than three years.



What does “proper abandonment” mean?

A “properly abandoned” water well is a well that has been cleared, plugged, and sealed by a licensed well driller or by a county or municipal government. The sealed plug must be constructed to fill the well hole for the length and diameter of the well. Merely capping an abandoned well is not enough to prevent it from becoming a problem.

Why should I properly abandon my well?



Unused water wells that are not properly abandoned leave open holes in the ground. These holes are dangerous. People (especially children), pets, and wild animals can get hurt or trapped after falling into an abandoned well. These holes serve as direct channels for contamination into Georgia’s groundwater. They allow contamination to pass straight through to a drinking water source used by many people.

Contamination, such as chemicals and bacteria, may enter the well from the surface environment. These open holes in the ground may also have been used for trash and hazardous debris. The only way to eliminate dangerous conditions and groundwater contamination from unused wells is to properly abandon them.

Are there laws about abandoning water wells?

The State of Georgia Water Well Standards Act of 1985, (OCGA 12-5-120--12-5-137) provides laws to govern the proper abandonment of water wells. To abandon a well, the owner must hire a licensed well driller. For a list of licensed well drillers, contact the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Watershed Protection Branch at 404-657-6126, or visit their website at www.gaepd.org.

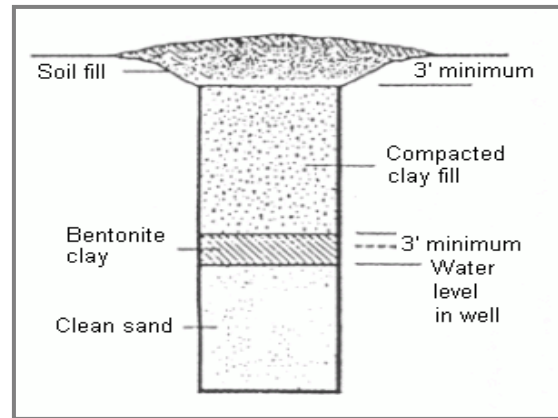
Well type and site geology determine the materials and requirements for plugging abandoned water wells. For example, flowing wells and wells that terminate in bedrock are required to be plugged with cement grout. Shallow, small diameter wells may be effectively plugged with bentonite chips.

How do I know if I have an abandoned water well?

Abandoned wells can be difficult to identify. A typical well casing is a metal pipe 1 ¼ inches to 6 inches in diameter. A typical dug well may be 12 to 36 inches in diameter, or more. Things to look for include pipes sticking out of the ground or floor of a basement, a ring of concrete or bricks surrounding a hole in the ground, or a dip in the land surface. Small buildings, such as sheds, may also house an abandoned well. Unnaturally wet areas may indicate a free flowing well (artesian well) that was never properly sealed. Licensed well drillers in your area can assist you with identifying an abandoned well.

How much will it cost to plug my abandoned well?

Costs vary depending upon the well depth, diameter, location, and other factors. The cost for plugging a well in Georgia usually ranges between \$1,000 and \$1,500. Well depth and diameter, well type, and local geology require different types of plugging material and methods. Your costs may be reduced by having your old well plugged at the time a replacement well is drilled or at the time you connect to municipal water service.



Who can I contact for more information and assistance?

You can contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Chemical Hazards Program at 404-657-6534, your county cooperative extension office, a registered well drilling contractor, or the Georgia Drillers Association at www.georgiadrillers.com.

Proper water well abandonment . . .

- 1) *Restores protective barrier to minimize groundwater contamination*
- 2) *Removes physical hazards by removing tempting openings for curious children and animals*
- 3) *Restores stability to the land surface*
- 4) *Eliminates or reduces liability*
- 5) *Protects and improves property values*

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Division of Public Health
Chemical Hazards Program
2 Peachtree Street, 13th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 657-6534

www.health.state.ga.us/programs/hazards