

Good Stewardship of Ground Water and Wells is Important

By Jerry R. Harke

“When the well runs dry, we know the worth of water.” – Benjamin Franklin

For those who have experienced dry wells, Ben Franklin’s adage rings true. However, good stewardship practices can help well owners avoid dry wells and other potential problems.

It’s important to be good water stewards throughout the year, but education for landowners about how to do that is a must. With this in mind, the National Ground Water Association has scheduled National Ground Water Awareness Week for March 8-14, to help remind well owners about how they can ensure clean, safe water.

Four basic steps, if followed faithfully, can provide a high degree of confidence in your drinking water:

The first is proper well construction. Your water well should be located away from any known or potential contamination source such as septic system leach fields. Also, wells should comply with construction codes to minimize the potential for contamination.

Second, get a yearly well inspection from a qualified water well system contractor. Poor maintenance — things like a broken well cap or well casing, or a dirty well—can lead to contamination within the well. Preventive maintenance not only heads off problems, it is less costly in the long run.

Third, test annually for bacteria, nitrates, and anything of local concern. Test your water immediately if there is any change in the water’s taste, odor or color. Also, the water should be tested more frequently if there is structural damage to the well or a potential new contamination source. Other reasons to test more frequently are if a family member or houseguest experiences recurrent incidences of gastrointestinal illness, or if a pregnant woman or infant lives in the home. Also, don’t forget to monitor the performance of home water treatment equipment.

To determine what might be of local concern, ask a qualified local water well system contractor or water treatment service provider, a certified water testing laboratory, or local health or environmental health officials.

Should any contaminants remain after proper maintenance, it does not mean you cannot use your ground water. Talk to a qualified water well system contractor about water treatment devices to address specific water quality issues. The professional can advise you on how to proceed.

Finally, but no less important when it comes to water cleanliness, is keeping animal waste such as manure or pet droppings away from the well head. Also, septic systems should be properly maintained to prevent system failures that can pollute ground water. Using storing and disposing of hazardous household substances properly is also critical. These include petroleum products, paints and paint thinners, and yard care and cleaning products. Don’t dump them on the ground, pour them down the drain or flush them down the toilet. Instead, contact local waste authorities about proper disposal.

Remember, National Ground Water Awareness Week is March 8-14. Learn more at www.ngwa.org.