

PROPER WATER WELL ABANDONMENT

What is an abandoned well?

Chemical contaminants, bacteria, and debris can enter the groundwater through water wells that are no longer being used. 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. To protect groundwater and public health, these wells should be properly abandoned.

What does “proper abandonment” mean?

A properly abandoned water well has been plugged and sealed by a licensed well driller or by a county or city government. The 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.

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.

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*

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 for well owners on the proper abandonment of water wells. To legally 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.



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

Abandoned water wells can be difficult to identify. A typical well casing is a metal pipe 1¼ 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 plugged and sealed. Licensed well drillers can assist you with identifying an abandoned well.

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 chemicals and bacteria from the surface environment to pass straight through to a drinking water source used by many people.

These open holes in the ground were often used for garbage and hazardous debris. The only way to eliminate dangerous conditions and groundwater contamination caused by unused wells is to properly abandon them.

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. Costs may be reduced by having your old well plugged at the time a replacement well is drilled, or when you connect to public water service.

Whom can I contact for more information and assistance?

You can contact your University of Georgia Cooperative Extension office, a licensed well driller, the Georgia Drillers Association at www.georgiadrillers.com, or the Georgia Department of Public Health, Chemical Hazards Program at 404-657-6534.

