

FACTS ON WATER



ENVIRONMENT

IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO HAVE A NEW WELL DRILLED THIS YEAR,
PLEASE READ THIS FACT SHEET FIRST!

Testing Your Well Water

Every day, thousands of New Brunswick families depend on drilled domestic wells for their drinking water.

These wells, in turn, depend on natural groundwater reserves or "aquifers". The quality of the water they produce is always influenced by naturally-occurring minerals beneath the surface. In addition, a variety of man-made substances and other aspects of our modern lifestyle can affect the quality of well water.

Making sure well water is safe for human consumption is a top priority. But, health questions are not the only ones facing homeowners who depend on domestic wells. For example, some naturally-occurring minerals in groundwater can be a major nuisance when it comes to washing clothes, even though the water is perfectly safe from a health point of view.

Preventing drinking water problems in New Brunswick is a key objective of the Clean Water Act. The Department of the Environment and Local Government administers two Regulations under this Act which involve domestic wells. The Water Well Regulation has been in place for many years and includes a licensing requirement for well drilling contractors.

It also contains a detailed set of standards which must be met during the well drilling and construction process.

Until recently, however, owners of newly drilled wells in New Brunswick were not legally required to test for the presence of various substances in their water. As part of the Province's continuing effort to protect our groundwater resource, such tests are now required.

The Potable Water Regulation under the Clean Water Act requires that all new wells be sampled and analyzed within 12 months of their construction. Owners of all existing wells being deepened or repaired must meet the same requirement.

What substances are covered in the tests?

The standard tests required under the Potable Water Regulation for drilled wells analyze the water for both inorganic and bacteriological substances.

"Inorganic" testing examines a variety of components such as: hardness, alkalinity, calcium, chloride, copper, fluoride, iron, potassium, magnesium, manganese, sodium, nitrite, lead, sulphate, antimony, arsenic, boron and zinc.

Bacteriological testing covers total coliforms and faecal coliforms. These substances are typically associated with the presence of decaying natural organic matter or discharges from sewage disposal systems.

The cost of the test is \$122.00 + HST. If homeowners wish to have extra testing for other substances, this can be arranged. Additional charges may be involved, depending on the specific test requested.

Are these tests required for my mortgage?

The Clean Water Act does not require the testing of newly drilled wells for mortgage purposes. However, some lending institutions, within their own policy and procedures, may require water quality information.

Property buyers in areas without a community water supply have learned that reliable information on the quality of their well water can often be very useful when obtaining a mortgage, or negotiating with prospective buyers.

What information will I receive on the test results?

For each of the substances covered by the analysis, a specific reading is provided. These results are compared with the Canada Drinking Water Guidelines and the New Brunswick Health Advisory Levels. If none of your results are higher than these guidelines, your well water is acceptable for human consumption and unlikely to cause nuisance problems.

If the results you receive for one or more substances are higher than these guidelines, both the Department of the Environment and Local Government and the Department of Health and Wellness can advise you on dealing with the situation.

If naturally-occurring "nuisance" substances are present in the water, for example, several products are commercially available which can reduce their impact. In cases where the test shows bacterial contamination, your septic system or other sources of contaminated water may be the cause. Repairs or upgrading of a septic system or your well may be required. Specific treatment systems, or other options, can be considered once the test results are examined.

No matter what the initial results are, the long term value of being able to refer to the original data at a later date may also prove very important to you as a homeowner, especially if there are changes to your well water quality over a period of time.

What is the well driller's legal responsibility?

Your well contractor is responsible for drilling a well that meets the requirements of the Water Well Regulation under the Clean Water Act. These requirements include standards for well casing, well water disinfection, and respecting minimum distances between the well itself and septic systems, highways, or buildings. The driller is also required to provide a detailed Water Well Driller's Report to the homeowner and the Department of the Environment and Local Government once the well is completed.

The well contractor is not responsible under the Act for guaranteeing water quality or quantity to the homeowner. It is strongly recommended by the Department and the New Brunswick Groundwater

Association that you sign a formal legal agreement with the contractor you choose, so that both parties understand the process before it begins.

How the System Works

1. Your basic well water tests will cost \$122.00 + HST, in the form of a cheque or money order, payable to the Minister of Finance. The well contractor you hire will collect the cheque and provide you with a Well Water Testing Voucher to use in submitting your water samples for analysis at the Province's Environmental Laboratory.
2. Your contractor will attach a permanent tag to your completed well, with an identification number. The Property Identification Number assigned to your property will also be needed for both the Well Water Testing Voucher and Water Well Driller's Report which is submitted to the Department of the Environment and Local Government. This number can be found on your property tax form or property deed, or by contacting the New Brunswick Geographic Information Corporation office for your area.
3. Within 12 months of having the well drilled, you must comply with the Potable Water Regulation by picking up sampling bottles and instructions from an office of either the Department of Environment and Local Government or the Department of Health and Wellness. Samples can be returned to the location where the bottles and instructions were picked up for delivery to the Department of the Environment and Local Government Laboratory.
4. The Department of Health and Wellness will send you the results of your well water tests. The Department of the Environment and Local Government will enter a permanent record of your well water quality and Water Well Driller's Report on its groundwater database. As noted earlier, both Departments will be available to provide you with advice at this stage, if required.

For further information on the Potable Water Regulation and the location of the office nearest you where well water sample bottles can be obtained, please contact:

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