

Proverbs, Quotes, and Protecting Your Community's Drinking Water

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If you have been in the drinking water business for very long, you are probably familiar with the essential steps of wellhead protection: 1) define the area to be protected; 2) identify potential threats that exist in the wellhead protection area; 3) manage the potential threats in order minimize their impact; 4) plan for the future by developing emergency and contingency plans; 5) educate and involve the public. I'd like to take a few moments to focus on these five primary steps of wellhead protection.

"When you drink the water, remember the Spring." Chinese Proverb

This proverb accurately describes the basic premise of wellhead protection – ordinary citizens taking steps to insure that we will always be able to drink from our well or spring. It is common sense to protect and preserve our surroundings, environment, and especially our drinking water. It is probably for that reason that wellhead protection was established as a voluntary process, not mandated by state or federal government. For operators, water managers, and local government officials, their water system's unique wellhead protection area map displays the land area critical to preserving the quality of their drinking water.

"Don't think there are no crocodiles because the water is calm." Malayan Proverb

Don't let the calm fool you. A contaminant could show up at any time and most likely when you least expect it. Ask a water operator that has battled a contaminant issue. I'm sure they can see the value in this old saying. Conducting an inventory for potential sources of contamination within your wellhead protection area might help you to gain insight into future problems, or more importantly could help you to avoid them down the road.

"Conservation is humanity caring for the future." Nancy Newhall

This short quote effectively summarizes why a community would invest their time and resources in a wellhead protection plan – for future generations. Whether working with rural landowners to minimize the impact of agriculture on groundwater quality or educating residents in town about pollution prevention and protecting drinking water, the payoff is in the long run. The protection efforts we put forth now will have the most value to our children and grand children; and the opposite is true – our children and grand children will have to contend with any of the issues we neglect. What issue is more important than safe drinking water?

"I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of national emergency, even if I'm in a cabinet meeting." Ronald Reagan

Don't be caught sleeping! An emergency is a sudden crisis that requires immediate action. Just as critical as the emergency is the response to it. For a water system emergency, the response could be as simple as kicking on the backup generator at your well, or as extensive as establishing a new water source. Obviously the latter takes a little more time and planning. Some of the planning aspects can be pre-arranged. For example, does your community own a backup well location in case of drinking water contamination? If not should you negotiate an easement with a landowner to preserve a location for a future well? These items will be more easily dealt with in a non-emergency setting as opposed to a stressful emergency situation.

"The great aim of education is not knowledge but action." Herbert Spencer

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of wellhead protection is not only educating the public, but facilitating a change, or action, in people's everyday lives and habits. The good news is that there are numerous ways to spread the word about drinking water protection: door hangers, newsletters, postcards, water bill inserts, newspaper articles, flyers, school programs, posters, presentations, and field demonstrations. There are also numerous agencies that might be able to assist such as NRD staff, University Extension agents, school teachers, community service organizations, public health departments, and non profit organizations such as The Groundwater Foundation.

Thanks for your time, and don't hesitate to contact Nebraska Rural Water to assist you with your wellhead protection plan. I look forward to hearing from you.