

# Long-Term Planning for Your Source Water Needs

By Doug Buresh, Source Water Specialist

It's really been enjoyable renewing acquaintances with operators, clerks and all the others working with water systems from across the state over these past three months. Several of you were already participating in Nebraska Rural Water Association activities when I first got into this business many years ago. I always enjoy meeting new people, too, and I've had the pleasure of meeting several. I am looking forward to seeing many more of you soon.

I've learned quite a bit about source water since I started this new position in July. To be perfectly honest, I have to admit I never really used to be all that serious as a water operator about my systems' water sources. I suppose I just took for granted that our wells would always continue to produce a steady supply of clean drinking water. That all changed overnight a few years back when I received lab results for quarterly nitrate samples. One of the community water system's two wells jumped from 9.5 mg/L to 26.1 mg/L. A confirmation sample verified the bad news. Sure didn't see that coming. That well is now on emergency standby use only. It's pretty scary not having a backup to the system's only remaining well.

Source water protection is vital. Eighty-five percent of Nebraskans get all or a part of their drinking water from groundwater. Losing a well when water from a contaminated aquifer becomes unfit for human consumption is costly and disruptive. The easiest way to make certain that groundwater is clean and safe for consumption is to prevent contamination in the first place. That is where a Wellhead Protection Plan comes in. Most of you have probably all seen the five steps of a Wellhead Protection Plan, but I'll repeat them for anyone who hasn't.

1. Delineating the Wellhead Protection Area
2. Potential Contaminant Source Inventory
3. Contaminant Source Management
4. Emergency, Contingency and Long-Term Planning
5. Public Education & Participation

It is not a simple process, but protecting your source water makes sense; right now, and for the future. The benefits to communities who develop and implement a Wellhead Protection Plan might be best understood by considering the costs of failing to do so. What would you do if your system suddenly and unexpectedly lost your only source of drinking water?

We all have Emergency Operating Plans for our systems. It's not a bad idea to have some sort of contingency or long-term plans in place to identify options for obtaining an additional source of drinking water. Don't be caught off-guard like my system was. Contact me at 402-480-4196 if you need additional information or assistance with source water protection.