

# Managing Your Wellhead Protection Area

## By Ken Halvorsen, Source Water Specialist

Every Nebraska community has a wellhead protection area map and we're all pretty familiar with its purpose: to display the land area that contributes groundwater to a community's drinking water wells. After a community identifies potential contaminants within the wellhead protection area, the next step is to prioritize which contaminants are the most significant and develop a management strategy for protecting groundwater that is also used as drinking water. Management typically falls within two broad categories: regulatory and non-regulatory.

Regulatory management of a wellhead protection area is fairly straight forward. This can include passing ordinances that are protective of groundwater – drinking water, creating zoning to control land uses around and within the wellhead protection area and establishing permit requirements for certain activities, such as drilling a well. These options may or may not be available to every community depending on the community's legal jurisdiction and the location of the community's wells. If a community's wells are not located within its legal jurisdiction non-regulatory management methods become even more important as a city works to protect the source of its drinking water.

Non-regulatory management may be as easy as promoting the programs and services of local agencies to the public. Here are a few examples.

1. Recycling programs can be an important part of wellhead protection. A gallon of used oil can contaminate a million gallons of fresh water. Used oil contains toxic metals, such as lead, arsenic and cadmium so even small amounts of used oil should be recycled. Many used oil recycling programs are administered at the county level or a local auto parts store might accept oil and send it to a recycling facility.
2. Education is also an essential part of wellhead protection management. Newsletters, articles in the local newspaper, water bill inserts, posters and brochures are all excellent ways to reach the public. Some communities have water field days in school or may take students on a field trip to the wellfield and other parts of the water system. This allows students to learn how a water system works.
3. Each of the NRD's offer cost shares for activities that provide benefits to both farmers and communities with wells that could be impacted by farming practices. NRD cost share programs often include deep soil testing and irrigation water analysis for nitrates. The NRD's vary in the percentage they pay to properly decommission unused or abandoned wells located in a wellhead protection area and the corresponding community.
4. Another noteworthy program is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). It is administered by the Farm Service Agency and encourages farmers to establish permanent vegetation on land that needs protection from erosion. CRP in a wellhead protection area can help assure the safety of municipal water supplies from fertilizers and pesticides. Land within the wellhead protection area may be eligible for an additional payment above the normal CRP payment.

If you are developing a wellhead protection plan for the first time or revisiting your existing plan, feel free to give me a call if you would like assistance. My number is 402-607-9750.