

Protecting Our Groundwater Is Vital

By Mike Stanzel, Sourcewater Specialist

The main goal of a Source Water Protection Program is to protect the land and groundwater surrounding public drinking water supply wells from contamination. Since approximately 85% of Nebraskans receive their drinking water from groundwater, preventing groundwater contamination is vital.

One of the most important steps in developing a plan is mapping out the contaminant source inventory. What is a possible contaminant source? Well you might be surprised! They can range from fuel storage, chemical storage, grain storage, livestock, gas stations, rail yards, junk yards, auto repair shops, auto body shops, sewage treatment, septic tanks, landfills, cemeteries, manufacturing plants, oil wells, and highway maintenance yards. The list can go on and on. However the one most commonly found could possibly be in your neighbor's backyard: a lawn, irrigation well!

We were astounded in a town we mapped out in western Nebraska. We were able to locate over 30 private irrigation wells. Most of them are not registered; probably none of them are cased; half were not even functional; and most likely, all are illegal. Every single one poses a major threat to the groundwater. We even found a few that were just a 6-8 inch diameter hole straight down into the ground. You might as well have a giant funnel aimed directly into the aquifer! Most of these wells were discovered by the operator's diligence by closely evaluating their cross connection control surveys and documenting all who have a private well.

Now the big challenge is how do we address these problems and how do we pay for them. Each city or village should have an ordinance enforcing the illegal use of these wells.

It will be challenging to get the property owners' cooperation to properly decommission these wells. Decommissioning a well can only be done by a certified well driller. We did check with a local driller and they stated that an approximate cost could easily be a \$1000 dollars per well.

We are also working with the local NRD and have discovered that they do have a cost share program to help offset the cost. Surprisingly, very few people have taken advantage of these funds over the past few years.

I am only 4 months into this new position and I feel I am learning more and more every week. I will continue to keep you all updated through these articles, and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. If I do not know the answer, I will do my best to find out and get back to you.