SAVE THAT WELL

By Russ Topp, Circuit Rider

(IT'S CHEAPER THAN DRILLING A NEW ONE)

Over the last 10+plus years working as a Circuit Rider here at Nebraska Rural Water Association, I have visited countless water systems across the state. Numerous times the topic of well maintenance comes up. As many of you know I am a firm believer of annual well maintenance. Most of the municipal well drillers offer an annual well maintenance and inspection program. During these inspections they will check your wire to water efficiency, drawdown, specific capacity, head pressure, meter accuracy, etc. If the motor or pump is starting to fail you may have a considerable amount of time to budget and schedule for the repairs. If you enter an annual contract, the inspection is relatively inexpensive and the savings can be unbelievable. I will give you a couple of examples that I have personally experienced over the years.

In a real but unnamed Village in Nebraska, the certified operator had been telling the Village Board about their main well, and how it had a terrible vibration in it. The response was we will fix it when it breaks. When that well finally broke, it broke in a big way. The shaft and the well column broke into three pieces and fell into the bottom of the well breaking the screen and permanently disabled the well. The operator tried to start the backup well only to find out it was not working either. The Village was out of water for three days. The system didn't have water meters and a rate of around six dollars per month for all the water you could use. The Village had no money to drill a new well and needed to acquire funds from a government agency to drill a new one. When using government funds, water meters were required to be installed. A new well was drilled outside the Village and some water main work was done. The "fix it when it breaks" philosophy cost this Village hundreds of thousands of dollars not to mention much higher water rates.

In the second example this water system had contracted with a municipal well driller to have annual maintenance inspections done on all their wells every year. It was discovered during one of these inspections that there may be a problem with one of the wells. The well was pulled and the casing and screen were videoed with a down hole camera, which revealed a hole in the screen. The system decided to have the well relined with a new screen and casing. The well lost some capacity but is still running fine after five years. The second example cost the system 40,000 dollars.

With these two examples it is easy to see that annual well maintenance really pays. Save that well, it's cheaper than drilling a new one!