

What Do I Need to Know About Plugging an Abandoned Water Well?

Groundwater from aquifers supplies over half of the water used in the state. With water being one of our state's most precious natural resources, we must all take responsibility for protecting it.

For many years groundwater has been pumped through water wells. Over time, these wells can deteriorate or not be in use and therefore considered abandoned. It is estimated that 150,000 abandoned water wells exist in the state of Texas. These abandoned water wells are not only a potential route for contaminants to enter our groundwater supplies, but also a safety hazard to children and animals.

Contaminants that enter a well are introduced directly into the aquifer because they are not naturally filtered by soils or geologic materials. If a concentrated chemical enters a well, it may reach levels in the underlying aquifer that threaten human health. This puts other wells in the aquifer at risk, particularly those that are close to the abandoned well. If your well is deteriorated it must be properly plugged and cannot be only capped. A deteriorated well is a well that, because of its condition, will cause or is likely to cause pollution of any water in this state, including groundwater. In certain cases, the contaminated water can even migrate to other aquifers, putting additional water wells at risk.

According to Texas law, a water well is considered abandoned if it is not in use. However, a non-deteriorated well can be considered in use if it contains a casing, pump, and pump column in good condition or if it has been capped.

You may plug a well located on your own property. If you do not plug an abandoned well found on your property, then it must be plugged by a licensed water well driller or pump installer. Before any work is done, you are encouraged to contact the Water Well Drillers and Pump Installers Program of the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) on their webpage, *Water Well Drillers and Pump Installers*, <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/wwd/>, and get a plugging method approved.

Before plugging a well located on your property, you should consult the *Landowner's Guide to Plugging Abandoned Water Wells* (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, or TCEQ, RG-347, <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/groundwater/publications/landowners-guide-to-plugging-abandoned-water-wells-rg-347.pdf>). This document is also available in Spanish, *Guía del Terrateniente para Tapar Pozos de Agua Abandonados*, <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/groundwater/publications/guia-del-terratieniente-para-tapar-pozos-de-agua-abandonados-rg-347esp.pdf>. If the well does not fall within the requirements listed in RG-347, a licensed water well driller or licensed pump installer can legally plug the well.

If the well is within a groundwater conservation district (GCD), you must complete the GCD's plugging application notifying the GCD of the intention to plug the well and you must pay applicable fees if required.

Within 30 days after the well is plugged, a copy of the well-plugging form should be sent to TDLR and the local GCD. The plugging report can be filed online (for details, see <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/wwd/abandonedwells.htm>); however, you will first need to contact TDLR for a user ID and password.

The basic steps to plugging an abandoned well are:

- Determine the size of the well.
- Remove debris from the well.
- Disinfect the well to ensure that disease-causing microorganisms are not sealed in the aquifer.
- Remove all removable casing.
- Fill the well with plugging material.
- Complete and mail the state *Plugging Report* form to TDLR (see <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/wwd/wwd004.pdf>).

Resources and Useful Links

Some areas of Texas have assistance programs for plugging abandoned wells. To see if there is a well-plugging program in your area check these resources.

- Your local GCD representative, which you can find at <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/groundwater/gcd/gcd-contact-list.pdf> or <https://www.texasgroundwater.org/>.
- Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board representatives, <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov>.
- Texas Groundwater Protection Committee (TGPC) has created an online map of GCDs with abandoned water well Cost Share Plugging Programs, available at <https://tgpc.texas.gov/water-wells/#7>.
- Further information about plugging abandoned wells is available by contacting a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County Office, <https://counties.agrilife.org/>.

Other Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

To find additional FAQs visit the Texas Groundwater Protection Committee's FAQ webpage at <https://tgpc.texas.gov/frequently-asked-questions-faqs>.