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CLOSE ILLEGAL WELLS

Illegal wells, or wells that have fallen into disrepair, are one of the greatest threats to groundwater in Nebraska and exist across the State.

Such wells can allow contaminants from surface runoff to flow directly into groundwater and make it possible for small mammals and reptiles to fall into the water, both of which cause contamination that is difficult, expensive and sometimes impossible to clean up. Additionally, these open water wells are dangerous for small children who could fall into the wells.

Since illegal wells are so harmful to groundwater, Nebraska regulations require that the wells be decommissioned. This means getting someone with a valid Nebraska Water Well Standards and Contractors' license to decommission the well according to Nebraska Health and Human Services regulations. This process involves removing well equipment, disinfecting the well with a chlorine solution, filling and sealing the well, capping it and reporting its decommissioning to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

Those who own and use the land on which the well is located for farming, ranching or agricultural purposes, or who own and live on the land, can decommission illegal driven sandpoint wells themselves. Other types of wells, such as dug or drilled cased wells, must be decommissioned by someone with a license to do so. A driven sandpoint well is one without a casing, with the sandpoint or sandscreen attached directly to the pump suction line.

Financial resources are available to help defray the cost of well decommissioning through Natural Resources District (NRD) offices. For instance, your local NRD office has a cost share program that will pay for a lot of the expense. The key is you need someone certified to qualify for payment, typically 60%-75% of the cost, depending on which NRD area you are in. The NRD maintains a list of certified well closers. The new CSP program asks a question about abandoned wells. Make a note to close them properly this year. For additional information, contact the Lower Big Blue NRD in Beatrice, phone 228-3402.

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