



## Why are abandoned wells dangerous?

Wells that are abandoned can lead to contaminated groundwater and pose a safety risk to children, adults, and animals. Death or serious injury can occur from falling into a well. If you have an abandoned well on your property, it is a safety concern and you are required to decommission it.

## What is well decommissioning?

Decommissioning is the process of properly filling in or plugging a well. It prevents contaminants from getting into groundwater that active wells are still using, and it also prevents people and animals from falling into well openings. To safely decommission a well and make sure it is done correctly, the work must be completed by a licensed well driller. The decommissioned well is then recorded with the Department of Ecology so future property owners know where wells used to be.

## How do I know if I have an abandoned well?

Today, all new wells must be recorded with the Department of Ecology, however many older wells were dug before this requirement was put in place. You can search for recorded wells on your property by visiting the Department of Ecology's Well Report Viewer (<https://apps.wr.ecology.wa.gov/wellconstruction/map/WCLWebMap/default.aspx>). Just remember what you see on the map may not show the location of some older wells. On your property, you may find signs of an abandoned well such as:

- Pipes sticking out of the ground
- A steel, 6-inch wide well casing with no cap on it
- Old concrete or brick-lined structures such as vaults or pits
- Concrete tiles
- Depressions in the ground or lawn
- Old water system components such as pumps, plumbing, and pressure tanks
- Open space under pump house floors
- Wooden or cement hatch-like openings to vaults and wellheads

Abandoned wells may be found under porch steps, in basements, near cisterns and windmills, or in small building structures such as old pump houses, storage sheds, and detached garages. Hand dug wells can often be found in lowland areas near surface water.



Well Report  
Viewer

## Take precautions!

There are many hazards to be aware of when looking for abandoned wells. Be safe and do not go out alone. Keep the dangers below in mind if you come across or search for an abandoned well.

-  **Fall risk:** It is possible to fall into an uncovered or damaged well. The opening might be overgrown or the cover could be damaged and break under added weight.
-  **Oxygen & toxic gases:** Well pits or other enclosed spaces that have a well can cause asphyxiation, death, or explosive conditions due to low oxygen levels and toxic gas build up. Do not enter these spaces. Find a professional who has proper equipment to safely investigate the well.
-  **Electric shock:** If electrical equipment is still live in well pits that have been flooded, there is risk of electric shock.

## How do I decommission a well on my property?

Well decommissioning is overseen by the Washington State Department of Ecology. To decommission a well, you must follow their requirements and hire a licensed well driller. For details, visit their website or call their regional helpdesk phone line at 206-594-0193.

### For decommissioning steps, visit:

<https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Wells/Information-for-drillers/Abandoned-wells>

### To search for a licensed well driller, visit:

<https://apps.wa.gov/wellconstruction/Wells/PublicPages/PublicDrillerSearch.aspx>

## Where can I learn more?

### Abandoned Wells: A Hidden Danger

To learn more about why decommissioning abandoned wells is important, watch this video from the Department of Ecology: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2a1uNtd5xY>

### Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-160-381

This section of the Washington Administrative Code details the state standards for decommissioning a well: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=173-160-381>

## Questions? Contact us!

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