PRIVATE WELL OWNER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Minnesota Well Owners Organization and the Minnesota Ground Water Association are partnering with others to enhance understanding by private well owners about -

- drinking water quality at their kitchen tap,
- contaminants that may impact their health,
- the need for routine water-quality testing,
- actions they can take to protect drinking-water quality, and
- resources available to them.

One of Minnesota's 930,000 private wells.

Private wells -

- serve residences, farms, recreational properties, and small businesses.
- are not sampled and inspected like public water supply wells.
- are estimated to number 930,000 throughout Minnesota.

Private well owners –

- are responsible for the quality of their drinking water.
- seldom test for drinking-water contaminants.
- lack understanding about what contaminants to test.
- are unsure about contaminant effects upon their health.
- often lack the resources to correct well construction problems or to add treatment.

Clinics to screen water quality are one means to provide private well owners with -

- one-on-one consultation with experienced volunteers regarding drinking water issues.
- advice to identify follow-up tests using a certified laboratory.
- succinct and understandable information contained in a well-owner portfolio.
- tools to manage potential contamination sources more actively on their property.

Private well owners –

- are concerned about their drinking-water quality.
- like talking about their wells and drinking water.
- appreciate someone taking time to meet with them.
- may not test their drinking water if not for screening clinics.
- need long-term support to identify and address contamination.
- give high marks to screening clinic volunteers.

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Based upon the experience gained with about 1,650 private-well owners at 15 screening clinics during 2021 – present across 12 counties, the Minnesota Well Owners Organization and the Minnesota Ground Water Association have arrived at the following observations:

An education and outreach program for private well owners should be implemented over 10-years -

- There are an estimated 930,000 private wells so the job is huge.
- Many private-well owners are in rural areas where population density is low and winter storms limit scheduling of water quality screening clinics or other forums.
- Allowing 10 minutes to consult with a private well owner limits the attendance at a water quality screening clinic to 50 – 200 people over a 5-hour period.
- It will take time to organize local supporters and to recruit and train volunteers for screening clinics or to serve as local, trusted sources for information and advice.
- Certified laboratory capacity for follow-up testing is likely to limit the number of water samples that private well owners can submit annually.

A muti-faceted effort is needed -

- Not every private well owner is going to attend a water quality screening clinic and other methods to have them test their water quality need to be developed.
- Private well owners are faced with a variety of water-quality issues that require different expertise to address such as arsenic, a failing well, or a nearby contamination source.
- Private well owners react differently to the formats used for outreach and education.
- Geologic conditions, land-use practices, and methods of well construction vary considerably throughout Minnesota so a common approach to addressing water quality issues is not practical.

Long-term support for private well owners is needed for them to be successful –

- A well-water analysis is just the first step in motivating private well owners to become stewards of their drinking water quality.
- Private well owners often need to be educated on an as needed basis versus learning everything at a water quality screening clinic, seminar, or a short conversation with an expert regarding a specific water quality issue.
- Water quality in their well or water quality health standards may change creating issues that a private well owner needs to address in the future.

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