

TIPS FOR BUILDING OWNERS TO AVOID WELL PROBLEMS

Any existing well on a property is required to be located on the plot plan submitted to obtain a building permit under Wisconsin Uniform Dwelling Code Rule Comm. 20.09(4) and most county permits.

However, most permits do not discuss specific setbacks to wells required by state well code NR812. Noncompliance can result if wells are encroached upon by new construction or damaged by demolition. This can render the well unsafe, cause groundwater contamination or create access problems to service or properly abandon the well. These cases can become serious, expensive problems for builders and owners. It's best to avoid conflict and liability by assuring that plans you submit meet the following guidelines:

1. A new building, or addition, should not be constructed causing a well to end up in a basement or sub grade crawlspace, or to extend up through a basement or sub grade crawlspace. Since April 10th, 1953 new wells have been prohibited in sub grade structures such as pits or basements. Older wells may sometimes be kept in certain dry well pits, but additions may not be built over the top of a well pit adjoining a house.
2. Wells may only be located in buildings with a slab-on-grade foundation (garages, pump houses, and sheds), or in walkout basements with the basement floor at ground grade on at least one side of the building. Reasonable access must be provided to allow servicing of the pump or well. Roof hatches, skylights, removable vents and high ceilings (industrial/commercial buildings) have been accepted. Casing must project 12 inches above slab and be not less than 8 feet from toilets, floor drains or sewer pipes. Hazardous and flammable materials may not be stored near the well.
3. For wells located outside of a building, the minimum setback is 2 feet from the center of the well to any permanent projection of the building such as eaves. A deck may be built over a well if it has a removable hatch to allow access for service and inspection. Drilled wells need access so submersible pumps can be removed and two inch wells may need to be pulled so the well point can be changed.
4. Masonry porches, steps, walkways and driveways must be designed so that any well casing they surround will project a minimum 12 inches above the finished slab and not be a safety hazard. Where strict compliance is not feasible, a variance may be requested for a raised ramp structure with a watertight manhole. **DO NOT** assume a variance will be approved.
5. Foundation drain tiles, clearwater sumps, clearwater discharges, downspout discharges and gravity building drains and sewers all require a minimum 8 feet setback to wells. Pressurized drains, pressurized sewers and sewage sumps require a 25 foot setback.
6. Wells must be properly abandoned (filled and sealed) **prior** to building demolition or burning to prevent contamination from getting into the groundwater, and a report filed by the contractor (DNR form 3300-5).

If strict compliance is not feasible a DNR variance from the well code may be requested. Do not assume a variance will always be approved. Please contact your local Department of Natural Resources Service Center, or a licensed well contractor, for more information.