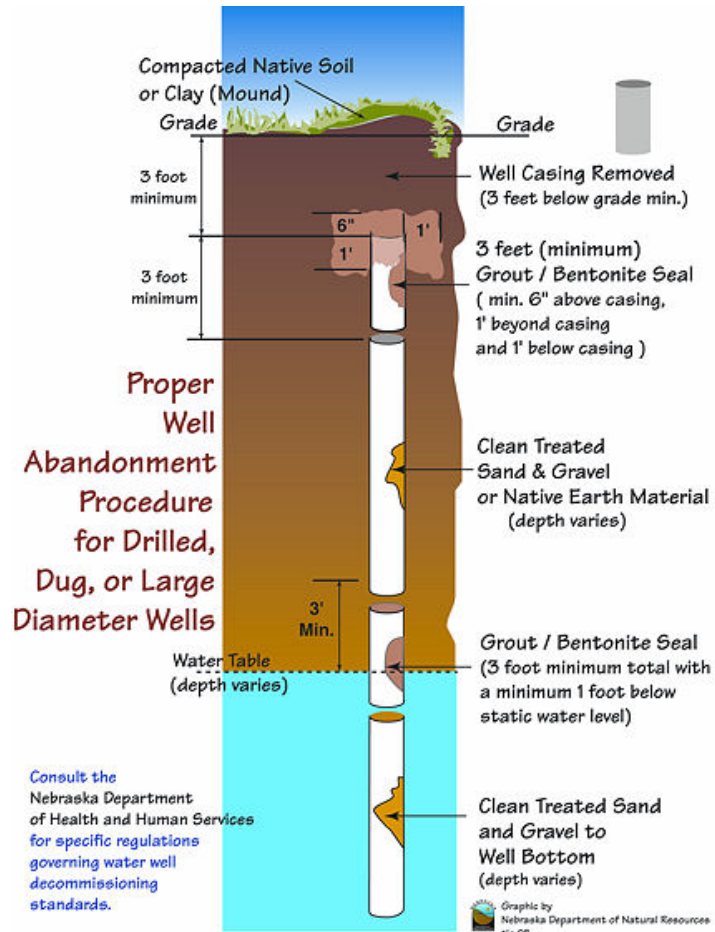


Water Well Decommissioning Fund

An abandoned well, not properly decommissioned, can be a direct route for numerous types of pollutants into the state's precious ground water supplies. Approximately 90% of Nebraskans receive their domestic water from ground water aquifers beneath the state's surface. It has been estimated that there may be as many as 150,000 abandoned domestic and irrigation wells within Nebraska's borders. Some of these wells have been abandoned for many years and the existence and location of many are unknown to even the landowner. When these wells are not properly decommissioned they have the potential to become not only a direct source for ground water contamination but also can be a safety hazard for humans and animals alike.

Nebraska state law requires that water wells that are no longer used be properly plugged and sealed according to rules and regulations of the Nebraska Department of Health (Title 178, Chapter 12). Proper decommissioning at present requires more than dumping dirt or sand down an abandoned well and or putting a metal or concrete cap over the top of the well casing. Proper decommissioning requires the unneeded well be filled with chlorinated sand to the top of the water table, a five foot bentonite (a type of clay) or grout plug be installed at that level with sand filling the remainder of the pipe with a second five foot plug placed from three to eight feet below grade. The upper three feet of the well casing is to be removed and the area backfilled and packed with native soil. Because of this potential problem and serious threat to ground water supplies the Water Well Decommissioning Fund was established by the 1994 Nebraska Legislature and is administered by the Department of Natural Resources at the state level.



The fund provides monies for cost-share assistance through participating Natural Resources Districts to help encourage the proper decommissioning of water wells that are no longer needed or used. The source of funds for this program is a portion of the fees collected by the Department for well registrations. Each year participating Natural Resources Districts are allocated funds based on the funds available and the portion of wells decommissioned by each district in the previous year compared to the total number of wells decommissioned by all participating districts.

There are minimum requirements for the Natural Resources Districts to qualify for state cost-share assistance. The district's program must provide cost-share assistance for all types of water wells and make assistance available for at least 30 wells per-year along with providing at least 60% of the cost of decommissioning the well. The districts are permitted to establish cost-share ceilings depending on the type of well being decommissioned.

For additional information of available cost-share assistance for decommissioning water wells within the state contact your local Natural Resources District.