

Domestic Wells and Drought



This handout provides information for well owners to help troubleshoot reduced well concerns, maintenance tips to prevent well issues, and potential financial resources if needed. More information on some of these items is included in the Water Well Owner's Handbook.

Dry Wells

Contact a licensed well driller or pump installer to assess the well

In many cases, a well has not permanently gone dry. A "dry well" could just be producing less water than before. Sometimes the water level has declined below the pump and the pump just needs to be lowered. In other cases, the well has stopped producing because it has collapsed or clogged. This can be due to problems with construction or a lack of maintenance. Search for a licensed well contractor through our database: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCX>

Contact a licensed well driller or pump installer to lower the well pump

A pump installer can help determine if lowering the pump will address the issue, and should be consulted with about the proper location of a pump. Pumps should not be set at the bottom of the well.

Report a dry well

Report a dry well or low well output to <https://go.usa.gov/xFbW3>. Reporting a well helps Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), scientists and water managers better understand changes in groundwater supplies and how those changes may be impacting people who rely on them. If you report your dry well, OWRD may notify you of funding opportunities and other assistance.

Portable water tanks and water delivery trucks

If you have a dry well or one with reduced output, you may be eligible to receive a portable tank and/or water delivery. This method **should not be used for drinking water unless all precautions are taken for proper disinfection of tanks, hauling equipment and all connections.**

Deepen the existing well

In some cases, deepening your well may be a good solution. Damaged wells or wells without a well report may not be able to be deepened. Contact a licensed well constructor to see if the well can be properly deepened.

Drill a new well

New wells must meet OWRD's well construction standards. Consult a licensed well constructor to determine the location of the well to ensure it meets setback requirements from septic and other potential contaminants. If your use of groundwater is pursuant to a water right and not an exempt use as authorized under **ORS 537.545**, you may need to apply and obtain authorization from OWRD for a water right transfer (a change in the point of appropriation) before using groundwater from the new well.

Using water from another well

It may be possible to temporarily use water from a neighbors' well while your well is repaired or replaced. To do this, you will need to confirm that the combined new and existing uses will not exceed the water rights or water right exemptions under **ORS 537.545**. Consult the Water Well Handbook or contact your watermaster for more information on exemptions. This method **should not be used to provide drinking water** unless caution is taken to test water quality and disinfect all connections. **Do not pour water into your well as this can contaminate the water supply.**

Protect groundwater – Abandon unused wells

If a well is no longer in use, it is important to have it properly abandoned by a licensed well constructor. Properly abandoning unused wells protects the groundwater from contamination for future uses.

Well Maintenance

Maintain your well

In some cases, reduced water output can be linked to a maintenance issue, pump issue, or well construction. Wells and well components require periodic maintenance. Make sure to contact a licensed well driller or pump installer to ensure your well is functioning properly.

Protect your pump

Installing an automatic low-flow shutoff switch, or a pump saver, will also protect your pump in the event that your well begins failing to produce water.

Monitor your well's water levels and conserve water

Watch for long-term changes in water depth and reduced water pressure, which can serve as a warning that your water supply may be in jeopardy. The amount of water in an aquifer can decline over multiple years of drought or after a period of increased pumping. If you use a well, it is important to conserve water and use it as efficiently as possible.

Potential Financial Assistance

Funding and the availability of these programs may vary over time. For general drought assistance, see the Federal Financial Assistance Programs handout: https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/climate/droughtwatch/Documents/Fed_Drought_Finance.pdf

Water Well Abandonment, Repair and Replacement Fund (WARRF):

<https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/GWWL/WARRF/Pages/default.aspx>

The purpose of this fund is to provide financial assistance to permanently abandon, repair or replace a water well used for household purposes when certain criteria are met. OWRD is prioritizing financial assistance to low to moderate income household wells that have been recently affected by drought or wildfire.

Contact: Kerri Cope, OWRD.Well.Funding@water.oregon.gov / (503) 779-5763

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-programs>

This program offers loans to low income homeowners of up to \$40,000 to repair or improve homes, including private water wells. It also offers grants up to \$10,000 to low income seniors (age 62 or older) to remove health and safety hazards.

Contact: Bret Dixon, bret.dixon@usda.gov / (541) 801-2681

Rural Community Assistance Corporation:

<https://www.rcac.org/lending-2/household-water-well-septic-loans/>

This program may offer low interest Household Water Well System Loans for up to \$18,000 to construct, refurbish, or replace individual water well systems.

Contact: Deborah Almazan, dalmazan@rcac.org / (725) 221-0474

Additional Information and Resources

Find a licensed well constructor

<https://go.usa.gov/xGMCX>

Find licensed contractors to work on water pumps or electrical

<http://search.ccb.state.or.us> and <https://go.usa.gov/x6QCW>

(Type “pump” or “water” in the search bar to find contractors with those words in the name.)

Oregon Water Resources Department

Well construction standards, well logs, well inspections, and well constructor licensing. Processes water right transactions.

- Well Construction and Compliance: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCV>, 971-287-8218
- Well Inspector Contact Information: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCv>
- Water Resources Department Well Owners Handbook: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCw>,
- Well Owners Handbook in Spanish: <https://go.usa.gov/x6mNN>
- Water Right Information: <https://go.usa.gov/x6QaE>, 503-986-0900

Oregon Health Authority

Information on water well testing and potential water contaminants.

- Domestic Well Safety Program Webpage: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCG>, 971-673-0440
- Tips for Testing Water: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCP>
- List of Accredited Labs for Water Testing: <https://go.usa.gov/xGMCE>