

**Are you living on a landfill?
Groundwater Council discusses residential & municipal well safety.**

Are you living on a landfill? That's one of several questions that members of the Fond du Lac County Groundwater Quality Advisory Council pondered last night as Liz Heinen, Drinking & Groundwater Specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) explained that homeowners do not realize that their houses or wells may be located near a former landfill site in the County until they have water contamination concerns. "Our database includes reliable information on where former landfills are located, and that information has been communicated to local officials in the past, but at times is not being looked at when new wells are being placed." Heinen explained that residents could benefit from a more formalized county process to check the location of a proposed residential well and ensure that it is not in a area where contamination could be an issue. "If I've purchased a lot on which to build a house, I am assuming that the location has already been determined to be safe, but that is not necessarily the case."

To give the Council an idea of how such a process could work, Ernst Clarenbach, Fond du Lac County Code Enforcement Officer, explained that "DNR allows counties to assume increasing degrees of authority for residential wells, and we believe there are two levels that our county could realistically consider." The first, ensuring that inactive wells are properly abandoned, is something that Clarenbach estimates could be accomplished with current staff resources. Clarenbach explained that inactive or unabandoned wells which are not properly sealed can act as direct conduits for contamination into active wells nearby. An ordinance on well abandonment is being drafted for consideration by the County Board. The second would allow the county to authorize the location of new wells and inspect completed wells, although Clarenbach stated this would take more resources than his department currently has available.

In the area of municipal well safety, David Lindorff, WDNR's Wellhead Protection Coordinator, gave examples of how Wisconsin municipalities have developed plans with residents and neighboring municipalities to maintain safe land use practices around municipal wells. "The water in wells originates in the area close to the wellhead. In comparison to remediation systems needed after a well is contaminated, Wellhead Protection Plans are a cost effective way to ensure that drinking water continues to be safe for your population." Currently, Lindorff says, county municipalities with Wellhead Protection Plans include Campbellsport, Fairwater, Mary Hill Park Sanitary District, Oakfield, Ripon, and St. Cloud. The City of Fond du Lac is expecting to have a plan for it's 15 wells completed in the next few months.

The Groundwater Quality Advisory Council will next meet to discuss land spreading of septic, municipal, industrial, and animal waste on Thursday, May 15th at 6:30pm in the City/County Government Center, 160 S. Macy, Rooms F & G. For more information, contact Wendy Giese, Fond du Lac County Code Enforcement, 920.929.3139 or Diana Hammer Tscheschlok, UW-Extension, 920.929.3173.