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Remedies for Parties Affected by Well Contamination

Midwest Environmental Advocates is a nonprofit environmental law center that works for healthy water, air, land, and government for this generation and the next. We believe that every citizen has the potential to make a difference.

Clean drinking water is a public health imperative and a human right. Many Wisconsinites get their drinking water from groundwater via private wells. Groundwater is susceptible to pollutants such as pesticides, manure, chemical fertilizers, and toxic substances from mining or other industries. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has implemented two programs that may compensate or provide a short-term emergency supply of clean water and cover some of the cost to replace or treat water from a contaminated well.

Remediation and Redevelopment Program

Private well users may be eligible to receive a temporary supply of emergency drinking water through the DNR's [Remediation and Redevelopment Program](#). This program applies only to residents with E. coli contamination of a private well used for drinking water where the source of the contamination was animal manure. Private well owners who have experienced a brown water event or had a positive E. coli test that may be from livestock manure contamination should contact the DNR immediately at 1-800-943-0003, between 7 a.m. - 10 p.m., seven days a week to report the contamination. If DNR determines that livestock manure is the likely source, it can immediately issue an advisory to the well user to allow the resident to access emergency drinking water. Residents can use a network of water companies to obtain an emergency drinking water supply delivered to their home. DNR staff will also take a water sample to further confirm that animal manure caused the contamination. Finally, DNR will provide emergency drinking water for approximately six months while DNR staff works with the private well owner to find a permanent solution, which may include the well compensation program.

Well Compensation Grant Program

The [Well Compensation Grant Program](#) compensates landowners or renters for replacing, reconstructing, or treating contaminated private water supplies serving a residence or providing water to livestock. Call a DNR [Private Water Supply Specialist](#) to discuss the options and requirements. Eligible parties may not have a family income that exceeds \$65,000 for the prior calendar year. Contaminated well water must be tested by a [certified laboratory](#) and the results must reveal a certain level of a chemical contaminant including, but not limited to metals, pesticides, volatile organic chemicals, arsenic, or bacteria contamination from livestock manure. If nitrate is the only contaminant of concern, the well compensation program may apply, but only if the contamination exceeds 40 parts per million and the well is used for both livestock and a residence. The first step in applying for a well compensation grant is to develop a project proposal and estimate the costs to replace the contaminated water supply. Next, applicants must fill out a [Well Compensation Program Claim](#) and mail it to **Well Grants Intake Wisconsin DNR - DG/5, PO Box 7921, Madison WI 53707**. Importantly, work completed before receiving an approval letter from the DNR will not be reimbursed, and only licensed well driller or licensed pump installers may complete the work. Once the work is complete, DNR will visit the site and complete a field inspection to verify compliance. Granted applicants have one year from the date of the award document to complete the water supply replacement, abandon the old well (if applicable), and request reimbursement.

For more information, please contact the following MEA Staff Attorneys:

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