

Protecting Your Well and Septic System

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Many horse farm owners rely on a well for water and a septic system for wastewater treatment. If you've recently relocated from the suburbs to the Prince William countryside you may not be familiar with the responsibilities associated with protecting and maintaining your well and septic system. The following is some basic information taken from two new **free** publications available in the District office, "**How to Protect Your Well**" and "**Your Septic System: A Reference Guide for Homeowners.**"

"A common myth is that our groundwater originates hundreds of miles away. In reality, most local groundwater come from rain that has fallen nearby, within a few miles or closer. The sources of pollution that could harm our wells are often located in our neighborhood or even on our own property."

Some common sources of well contaminants include coliform bacteria and nitrates. Coliform bacteria are found in people, animals, soil, and vegetation. Nitrates are found in fertilizers, sewage, and animal waste. Nitrates are very hazardous to infants. "The Public Health Service recommends that drinking water contain no coliform bacteria and 10 parts per million or less of nitrates.

To reduce your risk of contamination, make sure that wells are not included in pastures. Horses and other livestock should not be kept within 100 feet of wells. Apply the 100-foot rule to the application of manure, commercial fertilizers, and pesticides. Also make sure you pump your septic field at least every 3-5 years to keep it functioning properly and reduce the risk of human waste contaminating your well.

"Septic Systems are individual wastewater treatment systems that use the soil to treat small wastewater flows, usually from individual homes."

Remember that you need to have the accumulated solids pumped from your septic tank by a licensed contractor every 3 to 5 years. Be alert to these warning signs of a failing system:

- Sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms)
- Sewage back-ups in the house
- Lush, green growth over the drainfield
- Slow draining toilets or drains
- Sewage odors

To protect your septic system don't flush nondegradables such as grease, disposable diapers, plastics, etc. Poisons such as gasoline, oil, paint, paint thinner, pesticides, and antifreeze will disrupt the beneficial bacteria in the septic tank that treat the wastewater. It's very important to protect your drainfield from compaction. You should not drive over your drain field or allow your horses to graze on it. Don't plant trees on the drain field. The roots can interfere with the drain lines.

Make sure that you are informed about the added responsibilities of caring for your rural property. Your management decisions can protect your health and water quality in our community. If you'd like more information about protecting your well or septic system contact the Prince William County Health Department. If you'd like a copy of either brochure visit the link below.