



Frequently Asked Questions about Washington State Department of Ecology's Centralia-Chehalis Area Groundwater Study

from Ecology's Environmental Assessment Program, Watershed Ecology Section

Q: *Why does the Department of Ecology want to sample my well?*

A: Department of Ecology (Ecology) scientists are studying ground water – water that's under the ground – in the Centralia-Chehalis valley between Napavine and Grand Mound.

Clean ground water is important because we drink it from our wells.

With your permission, we'd like to sample your well, along with about 40 to 50 other wells in this area, to provide a regional "snapshot" of current groundwater quality and water-level conditions. We selected these wells because of their depth and their location throughout the valley.

Our purpose is to better understand the characteristics of your local groundwater system. We don't plan to regulate based on any new findings, and we're not looking for specific problems. It's your choice to allow the testing. You'll get a free test and a free report on the quality of your well water.

Q: *Why are you studying this area? Is there a problem with the groundwater?*

A: We selected this area because we have limited information about the current condition of the ground water. We're not following up on any specific problem. The Centralia-Chehalis area is growing rapidly, so now is a good time to see where things currently stand.

Ecology will be testing a new groundwater monitoring approach that we hope to apply throughout the state. The goal of this new program is to provide reliable information to local communities about the current condition of their ground water.

Q: *When will my well be sampled?*

A: We'd like to sample your well twice: once in May and again in October.

Q: *What will my well be sampled for?*

A: In May, we'll collect samples to test for pH, oxygen, conductivity (an indicator of dissolved substances), dissolved solids, chloride, phosphate and nitrate. In October, we want to return to resample your well for these same substances, and also to test for additional chemicals, including arsenic, iron, manganese and fluoride.

We also want to measure the water level in your well.

Q: *How is the sampling done?*

A: We first measure the water level by lowering a small water-indicator probe down the interior of your well casing to determine depth-to-water. The probe is disinfected with bleach and rinsed with clean water before use. This information helps us map the position of the water table across the study area, which in turn helps us learn the directions of groundwater flow in the valley.

After we measure the water level in the well, we'll attach our water quality sampling equipment to an outside faucet. If possible, we'd like to sample the water before it passes through any filtering or water-treatment systems, so we'll be looking for a faucet as close as possible to the well head. We'll run the faucet for a period of time to allow the well to stabilize, and then we'll collect the samples in bottles for delivery to the laboratory. The whole process takes between one to two hours to complete. You don't need to be home during this time unless you want to, or unless your faucet is in a locked location.

Q: *Will this cost me anything?*

A: There will be no cost to you for any of the sampling or analyses we conduct during the study.

Q: *Will I find out the results?*

A: Yes. About three months after each sampling event, we'll mail you a letter summarizing the results of our analysis. Your results will be compared to related drinking water standards to give you an idea of how your well is doing.

The results obtained from wells sampled during the study will be included in a final technical report, but the names and addresses of well owners who participate in the study will remain permanently confidential.

Q: *What will happen if my water doesn't meet the drinking water standards?*

A: You won't be required to do anything because the laws and regulations that relate to "public" drinking water wells don't apply to privately-owned, single-family wells. It would be your choice how to respond if the water from your well doesn't meet the standards. If testing shows there might be a concern with your well water, we'll recommend you consider follow-up sampling to confirm a problem really exists. We'll also provide you with contact information for the local county health department. They can give you further advice and information about the health considerations of continuing to drink the water from your well.

Q: *Where can I get more information about this project?*

A: Get more information about this study from the Department of Ecology's Web site at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/groundwater/underwaystudies.html#p12> or contact us directly by phone or e-mail. Contact our study lead, Charles Pitz, by phone at 360-407-6775 and by e-mail at chpi461@ecy.wa.gov

Well owners who want to have their wells tested, but were not selected in this study, can find out more by calling the Lewis County Health Department at 360-740-1231.

Thanks in advance for allowing us to test your well. Together, we're working with you for a better Washington.

If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact Joan LeTourneau at 360-407-6764 or TTY (for the speech or hearing impaired) at 711 or 800-833-6388.