

Finding a Water Well

Focus on

The Department of Ecology gets many calls from homeowners and prospective homeowners trying to physically locate a well on a piece of property. They may even have a copy of a well report but it doesn't show specifically where the well is.

CAUTION: If you are unsure of where a well is or what kind of well it is (ie: hand dug or drilled), be very careful when wandering around a property looking for it. Take someone with you or make sure someone knows where you are. You could trip over a well head - usually a steel pipe 6 to 12 inches in diameter. More importantly, you could accidentally fall into a concealed dug well. Look for depressions in the ground or rotting boards that cover a dug well, even inside a building. There are accidents involving old unused dug wells in Washington every year.

Here are some tips that might help:

Is there an outbuilding that might be a well house?

Small structures with no windows or a removable roof are commonly well houses. It might even be within a patch of berry vines or inside a barn.

Is the pump located in or under the house?

Check to see if there is any pump equipment either in a closet or in the crawl space under the house. It is possible that the well is under the house or buried outside with nothing showing above the ground.

Can you see what direction the pipes under the house are pointed? While not always the case, heading straight out from the house in the direction the pipes go is a good place to start. If the pipes are metal, you may be able to follow them with a metal detector.

Is there a circuit breaker on the electrical panel labeled well or pump?

If not the house may be connected to a shared well or community water system and the source may not be on the property in question.

Is there a vault or sunken area in the lawn?

This may be a buried well. Wells were often constructed below grade to protect the pipes from freezing.

If there is no house, can you locate where it might have been previously or where an RV may have been parked?

This will give you a good place to start your search.

Have you asked neighbors if they might know where the well is located?

They can be a good source of information. If they are also using a well, you might want to ask about water quality or problems with water levels while you are at it.

Have you checked with the county for an as-built plan for the septic system?

Because of setback requirements for the distance between a septic system and a well (including your neighbors' wells) its location would be included in any as built plans if they exist. If there is no plan for your property you could check for plans for any neighbors in case one includes your well location too.

Is the house connected to a local community water system?

If there is a water bill to be paid, there is probably a local water system. You can check with neighbors to see what they do.

Is it possible the property is using a shared well with one or more neighbors?

Look in your home title records, although many shared well agreements are not documented anywhere. Sometimes they were just a handshake agreement between neighbors years or even decades ago – so the well may not be located on the property. If it is a shared well on your property or the neighbors - you should work with the county to get it documented.

If you have tried everything and still cannot locate the well you may need to call a private underground utilities locating service

These services are not free but they have the right kind of equipment to follow pipes or electrical connections to help find the well.

I found the well – now what do I do?

Contact a licensed well driller or pump installer to see if what you found is usable. If necessary, work with them to get the well capped or covered until you can decide what to do with it.

An open well can be a safety and contamination concern.

Contact an accredited laboratory to learn more about sampling your well water. Wells that have been open to the elements may have become contaminated and require cleaning and disinfection. Some counties health agencies have basic sampling kits available.

If a well is no longer serviceable, it needs to be legally decommissioned by a licensed well driller. There can be groundwater contamination and safety concerns with an unused well.



Still have questions? Find contacts at:
<https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Wells>



To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-407-6872 or email at WRpubs@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.