
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Emergency Water Supply Wells for Public Water Systems

When a water supply emergency occurs, a public water system may need to activate an alternate source of drinking water as rapidly as possible to avoid interrupting service to its customers. Simply turning on a pump in an inactive well or connecting a new well to the water system, however, can potentially threaten public health if measures are not taken to verify that the water is safe to drink. For this reason, NHDES has developed the following guidelines for the activation of emergency water supply sources.

An emergency well is a newly constructed or previously non-approved well that the water system must bring online in response to an emergency situation or event that has impacted the water system's ability to provide an adequate quantity or quality of water. These events are commonly catastrophic or unforeseen, and cannot easily be remedied through other measures, e.g., water conservation, storage management or treatment. As such, it may be necessary to immediately connect the emergency well to the water system under an "interim" approval, before the formal well siting and approval process is completed. Following re-establishment of water service, the emergency well would be subject to the formal well siting and permitting process in order to be used on a regular basis and remain connected to the system.

In order to obtain emergency well approval the following steps must be taken:

1. Request an emergency well approval in writing and document the emergency which necessitates use of the well.
2. Compile the materials below and submit them to NHDES.
 - Town tax map showing all lots owned or controlled by the water system.
 - Copies of all easements held by the water system on land it does not own (if applicable).
 - A sketch of the proposed site showing all land uses, structures, roadways, topography and hydrography in the vicinity of the proposed well.
3. Meet NHDES staff onsite to review the well location, surface and floodplain setbacks, and sanitary protection area (SPA). During this site visit, staff will determine whether the well site meets SPA requirements. If it does not, the water system must document measures to improve the SPA that will reduce the risk of contamination.
4. Demonstrate that bacteria are absent from the well and nitrate concentrations meet current drinking water standards.
5. Document that the well was constructed in accordance with We 600 and 700 and there is a plan in place to sample for the full list of Safe Drinking Water Act parameters.

Once these steps have been completed, approval may be granted for the emergency well for a fixed duration and under the condition that the water system complete the formal well testing and approval process and obtain approval for the emergency well as a permanent source for the water system once the emergency condition is addressed. If permanent approval is not obtained, the emergency well must be disconnected from the system after the emergency approval period expires.

Water supply wells used by a water system on an as-needed basis to supplement the capacity of the system at times of unusually high demand or are otherwise defined as having a “standby” or backup role at a system are **not** considered emergency wells. These standby wells are considered permanent active sources for the system and, therefore require approval as a permanent source for the system.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit our website at des.nh.gov.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of July 2019. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.