
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Drinking Water Well Locations Relative to Septic Systems

Drinking water wells are required to be installed in certain locations following specific construction methods in order to reduce the likelihood of contamination from sources of pollution at or near the ground surface. **This document only pertains to private wells installed for domestic use purposes.** Wells regulated as a public water supply or wells installed for irrigation, geothermal or monitoring groundwater investigations have separate requirements.

NHDES regulates site selection of private wells under [RSA 482-B](#) and associated rules [We 600](#) and [RSA 485-A](#) and associated rules [Env-Wq 1000](#). These laws and rules define protective well radii [circular area(s) around the well] where certain entities or land uses are prohibited. For example, a well must be 50-feet from surface water bodies, 75-feet from property lines, and 75-feet from potential contamination sources. If there is a location on a property where all well location requirements (well setbacks) can be met, all efforts to install the well at that location must be taken. In these cases, the homeowner may need to remove debris, trees and/or have the driller construct a temporary landing or path for access. If site conditions prevent compliance with one or more well setback requirements, well installation may be prohibited or the water well contractor must follow *setback reduction requirements* (We 602.13 through We 602.16). Refer to fact sheet [DWGB 21-1, "Site Selection for Private Drinking Water Wells"](#) for important information on well setbacks and construction standards.

Water wells on lots with septic system design flows up to 750 gallons per day (home with up to 5 bedrooms) must be located at least 75 feet from components of septic systems. In some instances, the radius may be greater than 75 feet. Drinking water wells are typically installed for 4 main reasons: 1) a new lot is being developed; 2) an older well needs replacing; 3) a home that pulls from surface waters wants a well; and/or 4) a home wants a well rather than be connected to a public water supply. The process, specifically as it relates to septic design approval, of preparing to install a well for these four purposes are discussed below.

New Lot Development

A lot that is intended to be developed with a septic system and a well must go through the state's septic system approval process. All approved septic system plans indicate the location of the water source (e.g. on-lot well or water line from street). **Drillers are required to install the well at the exact location shown on the septic approval.** If it is not possible to put the well at the location specified (due to access issues, topography, buildings, etc.), the water well contractor must consult with the homeowner and their septic designer to amend the plan and submit it to NHDES for approval. Failure to do so is a violation of Water Well Board rules and septic system design rules. Septic designers should discuss proposed well locations with a driller prior to finalizing a design. *Septic approvals are NOT required to specify whether or not all water well board setbacks are met.* Even though a

homeowner has an approved septic plan, additional well construction requirements may exist. Note that the Standard Well Release Form *may* have been required in the septic approval process; however, this release form is separate from the water well setback reduction requirements.

Replacement Wells

For various reasons, wells need to be replaced over time. In general, wells can be replaced within 5 feet of the existing well without needing to amend the septic plan. If this original well location does not meet setbacks, the well must be installed using setback reduction requirements.

If a replacement well cannot be installed directly adjacent to the existing well, another location that meets all setbacks can be chosen and a well can be installed without needing to amend the septic plan. However, there is a risk that the well location may not receive waivers for approval when the septic system needs to be replaced. Obtaining advice from a septic designer prior to drilling is advised.

If this other location does not meet the septic system or property line setbacks, the homeowner must contact a licensed septic designer and NHDES Subsurface Bureau for approval prior to installing the well. A well driller shall be contacted during the septic approval process for advice on accessible areas for a well. **The well must be installed at the exact location shown on the septic approval.**

Seasonal homes pulling from surface waters

Homeowners of existing waterfront homes and cottages may want to install a well in lieu of using surface water. In this case, it is highly recommended that the owner determine if they plan to convert the lot from seasonal to year-round use and where a replacement septic system would be located in the future before a well is installed. Planning in this way could prevent future headaches, expenses and hardships to the *homeowner*.

If the home's seasonal use is **not** changing, a well can be installed that meets all setbacks. If a proposed well location does not meet setbacks, it can be installed using setback reduction requirements – but understand there is a risk that the well location may not receive waivers for approval when the septic system needs to be replaced. Obtaining advice from a septic designer prior to drilling is advised.

If the intent is to convert a seasonal home to year-round, the homeowner must contact a licensed septic designer and NHDES Subsurface Bureau for approval prior to installing the well. A well driller shall be contacted for advice on accessible areas for a well. **The well must be installed at the exact location shown on the septic approval.**

Lots fed by Public Water Supplies

There are separate rules and guidance for installing wells on lots served by public water systems. Refer to fact sheet [DWGB-21-6, "Constructing Wells within the Service Area of a Public Water System"](#) for more guidance.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or waterwellprogram@des.nh.gov, the NHDES Subsurface Systems at (603) 271-3501 or visit our website at www.des.nh.gov.

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