

Private Wells and Public Water Systems

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The water source provided for your family is one of the most important parts of your home. Thus, deciding where the water will come from is one of the biggest decisions you will make in your life. More and more local governments are putting in public systems and encouraging everyone available to hook up. Some are even asking well owners to give up their wells to get on the public system. That decision, though, may not always be in a well owner's best interest.

Before you do anything, you should consider several of the following facts. There are many distinct differences in being a private well owner and a user of a public water system.

Private Well Facts

A well can be designed to meet your specific needs in regards to quantity and quality of water. Installed on your property, a properly constructed and maintained well can provide adequate amounts of safe drinking water and operate on pennies per day. The pump, tank, and casing should last for many years. When the well is paid for, it will belong to you.

That means you are in control of it. But be aware that while properly installed wells are safe, they are like other mechanical devices around your home or even your car—they will need regular maintenance from time to time. Professional contractors can provide annual well checkups and a water testing. There are even water-testing kits on the market for which you can administer the tests yourself.

Occasionally, there may be a problem with minerals or odors. However, since your well is a small, closed system, problems can easily be diagnosed and treated. Always remember this is your well and your water. You control what happens to them and goes in them.

Public System Facts

Public water systems are expensive to build and maintain. Therefore, they require many hook-ups to be economically successful for the local government in charge of them. Water bills come forever, and consumers have no control over the rates.

And since consumers don't own the water, they don't have control over its contents. Public systems have to meet established standards, and report those to you. But their water can include additives you may not want to drink. The water is tested when it leaves the plant and at checkpoints along the system. However, there is no guarantee that the water leaving the plant is exactly the same when it flows from your tap. Many systems are huge, and it is simple reasoning to think that the bigger the system, the greater the opportunity for contamination. When a public system has a problem, it is often difficult to find or restrict to one area of the system. There are reported cases of contamination causing systems to shut down for days or requiring users to boil their water for much longer.

Rural areas often have other problems with public systems. If pipelines are especially long in order to reach the areas and water usage happens to be low, water can become stale. A more serious problem can occur when chlorinated water meshes with organic materials to form gases called trihalomethanes. Other problems a system can bring to rural areas are undesired growth and an increased cost of living. This is known as "urban sprawl."

Choosing a water supply is an extremely important decision. Please don't make it hastily. Learn as much as you can about water systems and their sources before you choose.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about getting a private water well or more details about the well you already own, contact your local contractor. Also, visit the Web site of the National Ground Water Association, www.ngwa.org, and its site just for well owners at www.wellowner.org.



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