



# Contaminated Drinking Water (HB 2860)

## The problem:

More than 70% of Oregonians get some of their drinking water from wells, and 23% of Oregonians rely on privately owned wells as their primary source of water. Yet in many parts of the state, this water is polluted. Thousands of Oregonians may be unknowingly drinking water that could lead to cancer, miscarriage and other serious health risks.

The most common contaminants in well water are nitrate, bacteria, arsenic and pesticides. This contamination can come from failing septic tanks, fertilizers, livestock waste, and poorly constructed or maintained wells on a homeowner's property or property nearby.

Well water contamination is common in many parts of our state, from coastal communities to the Willamette Valley, Rogue Valley, Central and Eastern Oregon. While water from public systems is tested for safety, domestic well water may not be.

## The solution:

Oregonians need to know whether the water they are drinking is safe so they can act to protect their families. Our state needs to do a better job of monitoring groundwater quality and reducing sources of contamination.

### Ensure that more well owners test.

The Safe Well Water Bill supports local well testing education programs and establishes financial assistance to help low-income property owners repair wells or install water treatment systems when necessary. It also requires certain landlords to test wells and share the test results with tenants.

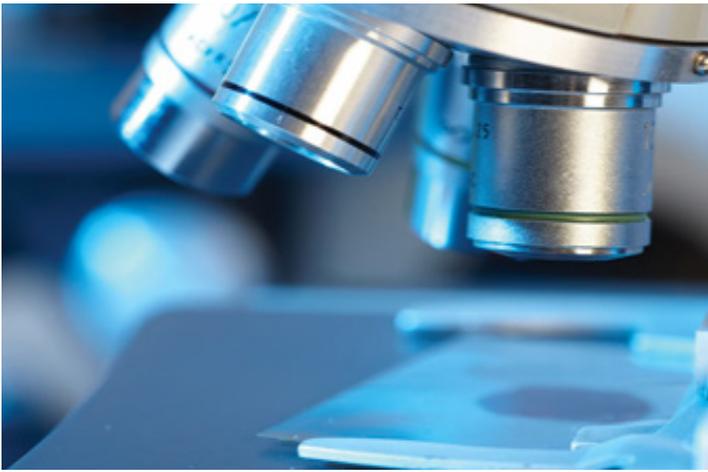
### Identify groundwater quality hot spots.

Analyze well test results to identify areas with groundwater contamination problems and make sure the community is informed.



## The 2019 Safe Well Water Bill Would:

- Direct the Oregon Health Authority to use real estate transaction well data to identify areas where groundwater contamination threats are greatest, and to target voluntary education and outreach to those areas.
- Provide funding to help low-income property owners repair drinking water wells or install water quality treatment if necessary.
- Provide funding for county health departments and other local organizations to establish voluntary well testing programs and public education.
- Require landlords to provide tenants with recent well test results for arsenic, bacteria and nitrates; and to re-test drinking water wells annually if contamination is present.



## Common Contaminants in Oregon Wells:

Contaminant	Health Problems	Sources or Causes
Arsenic	Cancer, heart disease, stroke	Naturally occurring
Nitrates	Miscarriages, birth defects, thyroid disorders, gastric or bladder cancer and methemoglobinemia (or “blue baby syndrome”)	Septic systems, agricultural fertilizers, livestock waste
Fecal bacteria	Diarrhea and vomiting (some E. coli strains can be deadly)	Septic systems, livestock waste, improperly constructed or maintained wells

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Can the state shut down contaminated wells?

No. Water quality in domestic wells is not regulated under law. It is up to well owners to determine whether their water meets drinking water quality standards, and whether or not they want to drink it. The state cannot shut down wells that have contaminated water.

### How much does a well test cost?

A test for arsenic, bacteria and nitrate costs between \$25-\$50 per contaminant.

### How much does it cost to treat contaminated well water?

Under-sink reverse osmosis systems to treat one drinking water faucet cost a few hundred dollars. Systems to treat a whole home can cost a few thousand dollars—well out of reach for many renters and low-income property owners.



### For more information, contact:

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