

Well Tips during a Fire Emergency

Oregon Water Resources Department | August 2015

Nearly one-quarter of Oregon's residents use wells as their main source of drinking water. Wildland fires affect areas where people rely on well water for their homes, ranches, and farms. There are a number of things to keep in mind if you have had any fire damage to your well. You can visually check for:

- Damaged and melted or exposed electrical wiring
- Damaged and melted PVC casing, liner or pipes
- Damaged well houses and pressure tanks
- Debris, such as ash and sediment entering uncovered wells
- Old dug wells with wood covers, which can become a safety threat

Exposed electrical wiring to the well poses a significant electrical safety hazard with the potential for an electrical short to the metal casing. If the electrical wiring has been damaged by fire, do not handle the wiring or touch the casing. Flag the area around the well casing as a warning.

Dug wells where the well cover has been damaged by fire presents a significant hazard to public safety. The well cover may be damaged to such an extent that the cover may drop into the well or be so unstable that walking on it may cause a collapse. If you discover what appears to be a sinkhole or an open hole, flag or barricade the area around it.

If your well has been damaged by fire, or you think an old dug well has been exposed, contact a local licensed and bonded well constructor or pump installer to determine the extent of the damages and what must be done to either repair or decommission the well. If you think a fire may have damaged your water supply, bring water back with you when you return to your home. The general rule is that each person will need at least one gallon per day of water for drinking, cooking and hygiene.

Wells must be maintained to prevent health hazards. Take steps to ensure your water is safe to drink after an emergency:

- Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute, let it cool and store in clean containers with covers; or
- Add 8 drops of unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water, stir and let sit for 30 minutes; and
- Have a professional service test the water to make sure it's safe to consume.

If you have your well inspected, make sure you choose a water well constructor who is licensed and bonded in Oregon. Names of licensed constructors are available on the following website:

https://apps.wrd.state.or.us/apps/gw/well_license/default.aspx.

There are a number of publications that provide additional information, including the Department's Well Owner's Handbook, available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/publicationsandreports/>.

Contact Information

If you have additional questions, please contact the Oregon Water Resources Department at 503-986-0900 or visit our website at: <https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/>.