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WELL SAID NEWSLETTER

Available on the web at OWRD home page, under *Agency Spotlight > Well Said Newsletter*. Please share with others at your organization. *Well Said* is a production of the OWRD Well Construction Section and is designed to inform the drilling industry and the public about program activities and other items of interest.

For questions, suggestions, or to subscribe to this newsletter, contact Kristopher Byrd at (503) 991-2470 or email at Kristopher.R.Byrd@water.oregon.gov



Serving the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management.

JANUARY 2026 WELL CONSTRUCTOR EXAM

The next Well Constructor exam is scheduled for January 12, 2026, at the Oregon Water Resources Department's (OWRD) office in Salem. To sign up for the test, please complete an application to take the exam and mail it to the Salem office with a check or money order in the amount of \$25.00 prior to exam day.

If an examinee does not pay in advance of the exam, they are encouraged to contact the licensing specialist prior to exam day to ensure that space is available. Additionally, folks who choose to pay with cash on the day of the exam should bring exact change.

The study guide, which contains the exam application and other exam materials, e.g., practice exams and video tutorials, may be found on the OWRD website under [Licensing Exam Information](#).

Here are the results of the October Well Constructor exam:

- Three water supply well license examinees passed the exam and were issued licenses after providing proof of their well drilling experience.
- One monitoring well license trainee was issued a license after gaining and proving their well drilling experience.

For information regarding the exam, please contact Buffy Madrigal-Adams, Well Licensing Specialist, at Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@water.oregon.gov or (971) 287-8305.

SETBACK SPECIAL STANDARDS

On smaller properties where a septic system is already installed, meeting the required setback distances for a new well can be challenging. In these situations, well constructors have the option to submit a special standard request. If approved, the special standard allows the driller to encroach on the setback, provided that enhanced construction standards are followed to ensure safety and protect water resources.

When preparing a special standard request related to setback issues, thorough documentation is essential. The submission must clearly show the location of the septic system on the property. This information enables the well inspector to verify the distance between the proposed well and the septic system. Acceptable documentation may include a septic map or an aerial image that identifies septic system features. These materials are particularly helpful when the well constructor cannot be present during the inspection, as they allow the inspector to locate the septic system on site.

For more information regarding Special Standards, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (503) 302-8618 or Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov.

DEDICATED MEASURING TUBES

Protecting Oregon's groundwater resources is a top priority, and accurate monitoring is **critical** in this effort. One key tool that supports responsible groundwater management is a dedicated measuring tube, an essential component for tracking water levels in wells.

A measuring tube is a slotted PVC pipe, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch in diameter, installed alongside the pump column inside a water supply well. Its purpose is to provide unobstructed access to the water column, allowing for precise measurement of groundwater levels without interference from pump equipment or wiring. These tubes are often installed permanently and designed to remain free of obstructions, ensuring reliable readings over time.

In some cases, installing a measuring tube is not just recommended, it is **required**. This may occur when specified in a water right permit, when the well is within a designated **Groundwater Limited Area** or **Special Well Construction Standards Area** (as outlined in OAR 690-200-0028), or when directed by the Watermaster for water management purposes.

Even when not required, measuring tubes are **strongly recommended** during pump installation, repair, or replacement. Installing a tube during these times is cost-effective and ensures compliance with technical standards. While landowners are responsible for making sure measuring tubes are installed, hiring a licensed well constructor or pump installer is the best way to guarantee proper installation.

For more information regarding dedicated measuring tubes, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (503) 302-8618 or Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov.

CASING HEIGHT FOR WELLS IN FLOOD ZONES

Wells located in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood zones must be constructed with the proper casing height to prevent floodwater intrusion and protect the groundwater resource. When a start card is submitted for a well within a FEMA flood zone, the e-file system provides a location alert to the driller. Well inspectors then follow a streamlined process to verify flood zone status and apply the proper construction standards. If the well is not in a mapped flood zone, the minimum casing height requirement is **one foot** above ground surface.

For wells within a FEMA flood zone, the casing must extend at least **one foot above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE)**. If there is no BFE information available, then the minimum casing height is **two feet** above ground surface. Inspectors use the well's GPS coordinates to confirm the ground elevation from the Oregon Department of Geology & Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) Oregon LiDAR Consortium. Inspectors also contact the driller to determine if they have information showing that the well site is above the BFE. If verified above BFE, the casing requirement returns to **one foot** above ground surface. If not verified, flood-zone casing requirements remain in effect.

For questions about casing height requirements within a flood zone, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov or (503) 302-8618. You may also contact your **regional well inspector** for guidance specific to your area.

NEW CONTINUING EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Oregon Water Resources Department is pleased to announce that the Continuing Education Committee has acquired two new members.

Tyler Mathers, WWC #2020, represents the drilling community. Mr. Mathers works for Mathers Drilling Company in Bend and has been licensed since 2020.

Stuart Dyer, Ph.D., filled the vacancy for a person having groundwater quality expertise. Mr. Dyer is a Healthy Waters Senior Advisor for Environmental Public Health within the Oregon Health Authority.

The terms for both members began on January 1, 2026, and will run through June 30, 2028.

The committee is **still in need of an additional member with expertise in safety**. As a reminder, members serve 3-year terms and meet virtually 4-5 times a year.

For those interested in joining the committee or if you have questions regarding the continuing education requirements, please contact Buffy Madrigal-Adams, Well Licensing Specialist, at (971) 287-8305 or Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@Oregon.water.gov.

REQUIREMENTS TO DEEPEN A WELL

Licensed well constructors who are considering deepening an existing well should start by contacting their [regional well inspector](#) for a well construction review.



Whether a well can be deepened depends on several factors, including:

- Was the original well constructed to current standards?
- Has a special standard been approved for the deepening?

If a special standard has not been approved and the well does not meet current well construction standards, the well inspector will provide the driller with a list of deficiencies. This information will help the constructor decide whether to reconstruct the old well to meet minimum standards or drill a new well.

Wells without an original well report cannot be approved for deepening.

The department relies on the **original construction details** to confirm compliance with standards. Wells that are deepened without an original report, or that are not properly recased and resealed, will be **required** to be repaired or permanently abandoned.

For questions about the deepening process, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov or (503) 302-8618.

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WHAT CAN A PUMP INSTALLER DO ON A WELL?

Pump installers play a vital role in keeping water wells safe and functional. For Oregon well owners, it is important to understand the limitations placed on pump installers. These limitations are designed to protect public health, maintain water quality, and preserve the integrity of the well system. Unpermitted changes to a well's structure can create safety hazards, degrade water quality, and result in violations of state regulations.

Pump installers are authorized to install, repair, or replace pumps and related equipment in existing wells. They can also perform minor adjustments or maintenance that do not alter the well's construction, such as replacing pump motors, installing pitless adapters, or adjusting pump settings. Routine testing of pumping equipment to ensure safe and efficient operation also falls within their scope.

However, pump installers are not permitted to alter the construction of a well. This includes removing or adding liners or raising or lowering the well casing. They are also prohibited from constructing, altering, abandoning, or converting a well. These activities require a licensed and bonded well constructor.

By adhering to these defined responsibilities, certified pump installers help ensure that Oregon's water wells remain safe, compliant, and efficient for years to come.

For more information on well alteration, maintenance, conversion and abandonment in Oregon, please contact the Well Licensing Specialist, Buffy Madrigal-Adams at (971) 287-8305 or Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@water.oregon.gov.

EXPLOSIVE USE IN WELL CONSTRUCTION



Although uncommon, certain well construction projects may require specialized tools and techniques, including the use of explosives, to complete the job effectively. Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 690-210-0060 establishes strict requirements to ensure safety, protect groundwater resources, and maintain accurate documentation when explosives are involved.

If explosives are used during the construction of a water supply well, the well constructor must record this information on the well report. The report must include both the type of explosive and the amount used. Accurate reporting is essential for maintaining clear construction records and supporting long-term well integrity and safety oversight.

The only explosive permitted inside casing or liner pipe is a commercially developed gun perforator. For any other type of explosive use, the constructor must obtain written permission from the Director. The request must describe the type of explosive, how it will be placed, and where it will be placed within the well. Explosives may not be dropped down a well or used to sever installed casing or liner pipe.

For more information regarding the use of explosives in well construction, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (503) 302-8618 or Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov.

WELL REPORT REVIEW DEFICIENCY SUMMARY

The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) administers the Well Construction Program to protect public health and ensure the long-term sustainability of groundwater resources. The program is designed to prevent wells from becoming conduits for contamination and to safeguard aquifers from depletion caused by improper construction practices.

As part of this effort, OWRD conducts a technical review of all well reports submitted within **120** days of completion. After the review, drillers receive feedback on any issues identified. Between January 1 and December 31, 2025, OWRD received and reviewed **3,914** well reports. Of these, **46 percent** or **1,818** reports contained at least one deficiency.

Construction deficiencies were found in **410 reports**, representing **23 percent of the total**. These issues indicate that a well does not meet minimum construction standards and may pose a risk to groundwater resources. Common examples include inadequate seal depth or the commingling of water sources.

Incomplete report deficiencies accounted for **974 reports**, or **54 percent**. These occur when required information is missing from the report, which can typically be resolved through amendments. For instance, a well may have a liner installed, but the liner is not listed on the report.

Late filing deficiencies were the most common, appearing in **1124 reports**, or **62 percent**. This category includes reports submitted after the required deadlines. For reports filed after July 1, 2023, it also includes late notifications of commencement of work or seal placement. An example would be a report submitted more than 30 days after construction completion.

It is important to note that a single report may have multiple deficiencies. For example, one report could be both incomplete and late, and it would be counted in both categories.

For more information about well report reviews, contact the Well Construction Section at wrld_l_wcc@water.oregon.gov.

ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

The Department's Enforcement Section reviews and processes agency enforcement actions including violations of water storage and use, dam safety, and well construction. Enforcement actions are taken only when voluntary compliance cannot be achieved. The actions ensure that Oregon's water laws are upheld, safeguarding public safety and resource sustainability. In rare cases where voluntary compliance cannot be achieved, the Well Construction Section (WCC) refers matters to the Enforcement Section. Between January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, WCC referred four well constructors and one landowner for formal enforcement actions.

As of December 10, 2025, the Enforcement Section compiled the following data on enforcement actions taken throughout the year:

Notices of Violation (NOVs): 683

An NOV is a formal written notice that goes to a landowner or other responsible party citing the specific statute, rule, order, permit condition, or standard violated. It includes the date of the violation and the timeframe for correction. There were three NOVs sent out related to well construction, not including NOVs related to backflow in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area. The three well construction related NOV's were issued for the following deficiencies:

- Constructing and operating unpermitted wells.
- Constructing a well without a well constructor's license or landowner permit.
- Failing to ensure the well casing height meets the flood elevation standard.

Continued next page

Enforcement Statistics, cont'd

Notices of Assessment of Civil Penalty (NOAs): 17

An NOA goes to licensed well constructors or other responsible parties to impose a civil penalty and outlines the violation, the penalty amount, and the right of the recipient to request a hearing. There were five NOAs sent out for well construction for the following violations:

- Flood elevation standard.
- Late/missing documents, late start card fees, and late groundwater use recording fees.
- Material misstatements of fact.
- Improper well construction.

Final Orders Issued: 13

In five instances, well construction notices of assessment were not resolved and the matter was addressed by a final order.

The Department remains committed to achieving compliance and working collaboratively with well constructors to protect Oregon's groundwater resources. For more information on the Department's enforcement program, visit the Enforcement page (currently under development): <https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/enforcement/Pages/default.aspx>

MEET CALEB PUSZKIEWICZ, SC REGION WELL INSPECTOR

Caleb Puszkiewicz recently joined the Oregon Water Resources Department as the South-Central Region well inspector, based out of Klamath Falls. His path into water resources began years ago in Far North Queensland, where an unexpected visit to a sapphire field sparked a curiosity about minerals, landscapes, and the stories they tell. That early interest eventually grew into a career in geology and hydrogeology, shaped by more than a decade of study and fieldwork in Australia.



Caleb completed his master's research in Townsville, Queensland, where he focused on characterizing distinct groundwater areas using major ion chemistry and stable water isotopes. His work there centered on identifying the processes that shape groundwater systems — experience that continues to guide his approach to understanding subsurface conditions here in Oregon.

Before transitioning into the geosciences, Caleb served in both the U.S. Navy and Army. Those years taught him habits he carries into his current role: staying organized, taking initiative, paying attention to detail, and approaching fieldwork with a focus on safety. He later worked in geothermal and coal-gasification power plants, where he gained a practical appreciation for autonomous, task-driven work in complex environments.

Caleb has lived and worked in several parts of the world — from Southeast Asia to Germany to the tropics of northern Australia — but he is glad to be back in a landscape with seasons, mountain air, and pristine lakes. He enjoys exploring Oregon's mineral-rich terrain with his wife and still keeps an eye out for a good rockhounding site.

He looks forward to supporting well construction and groundwater stewardship across the region and values the chance to work alongside the drilling community and his colleagues at OWRD. Caleb may be reached at (971) 718-2222 or Caleb.E.Puszkiewicz@water.oregon.gov.

NEW NORTHWEST REGION MANAGER

Travis Kelly has been hired as the new Northwest Region Manager in the Field Services Division; he replaces Mike McCord who retired on October 31, 2026.

Travis began work in his new position on January 1, 2026. The Northwest (NW) region covers 13 counties, including Oregon's most populous areas and major metropolitan hubs. With the Willamette Basin and North Coast watersheds, the region faces complex water challenges, including numerous irrigation districts, active water users, major storage projects, and large municipalities. It is divided into six Watermaster Districts, each responsible for timely water management and water law enforcement.

Travis brings 17 years of experience with the Oregon Water Resources Department, having served as a Watermaster, Assistant Watermaster, Well Inspector, Hydrographer, and most recently the Well Construction Compliance Coordinator. A lifelong Oregonian raised in La Grande, his passion for Oregon's rivers, forests, and mountains began early. While attending Southern Oregon University, a seasonal job measuring streamflow for the District 13 Watermaster's Office introduced him to water management and launched his career.

Outside of work, Travis prioritizes time with his family. He enjoys staying active, and when not with family, he's usually at the gym or skiing.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



New monitoring well in SC Oregon



New piezometer well in SW Oregon

WINTER CONDITIONS: SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

As winter sets in, so do the hazards that come with cold, wet, and icy conditions. Slips, trips, and falls remain some of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) most commonly reported workplace injuries and winter weather can significantly increase the risk. Snow, ice, rain, and freezing temperatures can quickly turn job sites, equipment, and roads into slick surfaces. A few proactive steps can help keep you, your coworkers, and visitors safe throughout the season.

1. Proper Footwear and Gear

- Wear slip-resistant, insulated boots suitable for snow and ice.
- Use gloves that allow good grip on tools and equipment.
- Consider traction devices or cleats for particularly icy conditions.

2. Safe Movement on Site

- Take slow, deliberate steps and keep three points of contact when climbing ladders or platforms.
- Use handrails whenever available.
- Avoid carrying heavy or awkward items in slippery areas and use team lifts when possible.



3. Maintain Clear Work Areas

- Shovel snow and apply sand or ice melt around rig access points and high-traffic areas.
- Keep hoses, cords, and equipment organized to prevent tripping hazards.
- Use mats or absorbent materials indoors if the rig has a shelter or shop area.

4. Inspect Equipment and Surfaces

- Check rig steps, ladders, and handrails for ice buildup or damage.
- Ensure all surfaces are dry or treated before climbing or stepping.
- Keep tools and materials off walking paths whenever possible.

5. Be Extra Cautious in Changing Conditions

- Monitor weather forecasts and adjust work schedules if conditions become too hazardous.
- Use additional lighting in low-light areas to identify hidden ice or obstacles.
- Encourage crew communication, spot potential hazards, and warn each other.



If a slip, trip, or fall occurs, report it immediately, even if there's no apparent injury. Early reporting allows supervisors to correct hazards and prevent further accidents. First aid and emergency procedures should always be accessible on site.

For more information on preventing slips, trips, and falls, please visit this OSHA webpage: <https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather/hazards#walking>

MORE PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



Improper flowing artesian well cap



New well in NW Oregon



New well in Eastern Oregon



Well constructor welding casing



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