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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 Tony Janicek at (971) 718-7921 or email at Tony.M.Janicek@water.oregon.gov



Serving the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management.

WELL CONSTRUCTION COMPLIANCE COORDINATOR

The Oregon Water Resources Department is excited to announce that Tommy Laird was promoted to the position of Well Construction Compliance Coordinator effective May 1, 2026. He replaces Travis Kelly who was promoted to Northwest Region Manager in January 2026. In this new role, Tommy provides technical guidance and training to staff, supports the timely and accurate review of well reports, and works closely with the well construction industry to resolve deficiencies and promote voluntary compliance. The position also assists with enforcement coordination, provides expert testimony when needed, and delivers continuing education and outreach to well constructors throughout the state. In addition, the role supports the review of complex special standard requests and water right applications while promoting program transparency through reporting and public engagement.

2026 WELL CONSTRUCTOR EXAM

The next Well Constructor exam is scheduled for July 13, 2026, at the Oregon Water Resources Department's (OWRD) office in Salem. To sign up to take the test, please complete an application which is located on the first two pages of the study guide. Mail the completed application and check or money order in the amount of \$25.00 to the Salem office. The study guide and other exam materials, including practice exams and video tutorials, can be found on the OWRD website under [Licensing Exam Information](#).

Below are the results of the April 2026 Well Constructor exam:

- Three water supply well license examinee passed the exam and were issued licenses after providing proof of their well drilling experience & welding proficiency.
- Six monitoring well license examinees passed the exam and were issued licenses after providing proof of their well drilling experience.

Please contact Buffy Madrigal-Adams, Well Licensing Specialist, with your questions regarding the exam or drilling experience requirements. She may be reached at Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@water.oregon.gov or (971) 287-8305.

DROUGHT CONDITIONS AND WELL DEEPENING

Oregon continues to face persistent drought conditions across many regions of the state, and the Department (OWRD) has observed an increase in reports of reduced well production, potential dry wells, and requests to deepen existing wells. Reduced snowpack, limited precipitation, and below-average groundwater recharge are contributing factors, particularly in areas where static water levels have already shown long-term declines.

As these conditions intensify, well constructors may experience a higher volume of service calls related to compromised well performance or well failure. Landowners reporting diminished production should be directed to [Report a Dry Well](#) on OWRD's [Drought webpage](#), which provides access to current drought information, statewide drought declarations, and water conservation resources.

OWRD would also like to remind well constructors of the review process for any **proposed deepening of an existing well**. Requests should be emailed to the regional Well Inspector responsible for the well's location, with Tommy Laird, Well Construction Compliance Coordinator, copied on the correspondence. The original well report **must** accompany the request to allow Department staff to review the existing construction and determine whether deepening is appropriate **before any work begins**.

When preparing the well report associated with alteration or deepening activities, **all** modifications must be clearly documented. This includes the original well report number, existing construction details, new total depth, water-bearing zones encountered, static water levels, and any additional information needed to fully describe the work performed. If the report form does not provide a specific field for certain details, they should be placed in the **Comments** section. Additionally, when entering borehole construction information, the existing borehole data from the original well report should be retained, with a separate entry added for the deepening borehole.

For questions related to well deepening, regional well inspectors are available for consultation:



Central Region (Bend): Carley Mayes, 971-493-9414
Eastern Region (Baker City): Jon Sanfilippo, 971-599-9762
North Central Region (Pendleton): Shaun Finn, 541-969-9896
Northwest Region (Salem): Ryan Pillsbury, 971-493-2012
South Central Region (Klamath): Caleb Puskiewicz, 971-718-2222
Southwest Region (Medford): Joseph Wallner-Sentle, 541-218-5122



START CARD NOTIFICATIONS

Since July 1, 2023, well constructors have been required to submit **Commence Work** and **Seal Placement Notifications** to the Department. During well report review, missing or overdue notifications for these two items continue to be among the most common deficiencies identified.

A Commence Work Notification must be filed **on the exact day work begins**, prior to starting. Early submissions are not permitted. Once submitted, the notification will prevent the Start Card from expiring. If work does not begin on the day the notification was provided, the well constructor should login to the Start Card e-file system and submit a Cancel Work Notification. A new Commence Work Notification must then be submitted on the day that work begins.

Seal Placement Notifications are only required when the seal placement occurs **on a different day than originally proposed** on the Start Card. In these cases, the notification must be submitted at least four hours prior to placing the seal. Unlike the Commence Work Notification, the Seal Placement Notification may be submitted in advance.

For instance, if a well constructor starts drilling on a Friday and plans to place the seal early Monday, they can submit the Seal Placement Notification on Friday evening for an 8:00 a.m. Monday seal, overriding the originally proposed date on the Start Card. This meets the requirement to notify the Department at least **four hours** before seal placement. If seal placement does not occur as planned, the well constructor should submit a **Cancel Seal Placement** Notification in Manage Pending Start Cards in the e-file Start Card application. A **new** notification will be required a minimum of **four hours** in advance of the **revised** seal placement time.

For more information regarding Start Card Notifications, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Compliance Coordinator, at Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov or (503) 302-8618.

RECORDING FEE FOR EXEMPT USE WELLS

One of the most common questions received by the Well Construction Section concerns Oregon's exempt use recording fee requirements. Understanding these requirements can help avoid delays, billing issues, and potential enforcement actions.

Under Oregon law, most groundwater uses require a water right. However, certain uses, with some limitations, are exempt from obtaining a water right permit. Common exempt uses include domestic wells, stock watering, lawn and garden irrigation of up to one-half acre, and certain commercial or industrial uses.

For every new exempt use well constructed in Oregon, a one-time \$300 groundwater use recording fee and an exempt use map are required. Both items must be submitted alongside the well report by the well constructor. For wells constructed under a landowner permit, the landowner is responsible for these requirements. The exempt use map must show the exact location of the completed well on the tax lot. When filing electronically, the Department's mapping tool is integrated into the well report submission process.

A few important reminders:

- A separate \$300 fee and map are required for each exempt use well
- The fee and map are due when the well report is submitted
- Dry holes and low-producing wells are still subject to the fee
- No fee is required if the well is properly decommissioned
- Wells associated with a valid water right permit are not subject to the exempt use recording fee; the associated permit or transfer number must be provided to verify the exemption

The Department relies on this map and fee to evaluate groundwater conditions, conduct essential studies, and maintain accurate well records for future resource management. Failure to submit the required fee or map may result in billing actions and civil penalties. Taking a few extra minutes to ensure the fee and map are submitted correctly can save significant time and effort later.

Drillers experiencing issues paying the recording fee online while e-filing a well report should contact Buffy Madrigal-Adams for assistance at Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@water.oregon.gov or (971) 287-8305.

OREGON DROUGHT 2026

As Oregon enters another year of drought concerns, well constructors are often among the first to see the impacts on water supplies. Declining water levels, reduced well yields, increased demand for new wells, and concerns from landowners are common indicators that drought conditions are affecting local groundwater resources.

The Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) maintains the Oregon Drought Watch website, a valuable resource for drillers, landowners, and water users throughout the state. The site provides current drought conditions, water supply information, drought declarations, reservoir storage data, and resources for reporting dry wells.

Monitoring drought conditions can help well constructors stay informed about regional water supply trends and better assist customers who may be experiencing water shortages. The information can also provide useful context when evaluating changing groundwater conditions or discussing water supply concerns with landowners.

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The Department encourages reporting dry wells during drought periods. These reports help the state track drought impacts and improve understanding of how drought affects groundwater resources across Oregon. The Drought Watch website is updated regularly and serves as a central location for drought-related information from OWRD and partner agencies. Whether responding to customer concerns, planning upcoming work, or simply staying informed about local water conditions, the site is a valuable resource.

Visit the Oregon Drought Watch website to view current drought conditions and water supply information: <https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/climate/droughtwatch/Pages/default.aspx>

ABOVE GROUND MONITORING WELL COMPLETIONS

Monitoring wells that are completed above ground surface require a minimum casing height of **1 foot above grade**. If the well casing is plastic, a metal protective casing is required to be installed around the well. This protective casing must extend at least **6 inches above** the top of the well casing and at least 2 feet into the ground. The well casing must be sealed with a cap, while the encompassing protective casing must include a **lockable lid** with lock.

Above ground wells also need to be protected from damage by installing three concrete filled metal posts in a triangular array surrounding the well. The posts must be at least **3 inches** in diameter, extend at least **3 feet above** and 3 feet below ground surface, and be a minimum of **2 feet from the well**. If other surface protection methods are proposed, then special standards will be required.

For identification purposes, the Start Card number needs to be permanently attached, stamped, or engraved on the protective casing. For above-grade completions, the well label should be attached to the **outside** of the protective casing where it is easy to read. Labels placed on the inner well casing do not meet construction requirements and will need to be corrected.

For more information regarding above-ground monitoring well completions, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Compliance Coordinator, at (503) 302-8618 or Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov.

CASING DEPTH LIMITS

Choosing the right casing for a well, both in size and strength, is critical to keeping the well structurally sound and performing well over time. When casing is used beyond its depth limitations, the well's integrity can be compromised, leading to expensive repairs and corrective actions.

For steel casing with a nominal diameter greater than 10 inches and a wall thickness of 0.250 inch that meets or exceeds ASTM A-53 Grade A or B standards, there are maximum depth limitations. A 12 inch casing should not be installed deeper than **500 feet**. Casings in the 14 to 16 inch range are limited to **250 feet**, and those between 18 and 20 inches must not exceed **100 feet**. Anything larger than 20 inches must have a minimum wall thickness of 0.375 inch to be used safely.

PVC casing has its own material requirements and depth limits. Acceptable options include PVC Type 1120 or 1220 that meet the appropriate NSF and ASTM specifications. The allowable depth depends on the Standard Dimension Ratio (SDR), because the deeper the installation, the greater the risk of collapse. For example, SDR 21 (Class 200) casing is suitable only to **150 feet**, while SDR 26 (Class 160) casing should not be installed deeper than **100 feet**.

Before installation, well constructors should double check casing specifications to ensure the material is appropriate for the intended depth and conditions.

For more information about casing depth requirements, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Compliance Coordinator, at Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov or (503) 302-8618.

PITLESS INSTALLATIONS AND ANNULAR SEALS

Pitless adapters are a reliable and widely used method for protecting water systems from freezing temperatures. However, a common issue observed during recent well inspections is the failure to properly restore the annular seal after pitless installation. In all cases, native soil was used as backfill around the well casing after excavation for the pitless adapter. While this may restore the surface appearance, it does not meet well construction standards or provide the protective function of a bentonite seal.

The annular seal is critical because it prevents the vertical movement of water and contaminants along the outside of the casing. Without a properly restored seal, surface water, shallow groundwater, bacteria, nitrates, pesticides, and other contaminants may migrate downward and impact groundwater quality, creating potential health hazards.

To comply with Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR), the annular seal must be restored with bentonite after pitless installation. OWRD understands that not all well constructors install pumps and pitless adapters, and that these installations may be completed by landowners or pump installers. Please help inform landowners and pump installers of these requirements. Taking the time to properly reseal the annular space around the well helps protect groundwater, safeguard public health, maintain well integrity, and avoid future compliance issues.

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

BACKFILL AND FILTER PACK DEPTH REPORTING

A recurring issue found during the review of the Borehole Construction section of well reports is the incorrect listing of backfill and filter pack intervals. These depths are often reported from the bottom up rather than from the land surface downward.

For example, well reports sometimes include entries such as:

- Backfill from 400 to 280 feet
- Filter pack from 75 to 30 feet

However, all depths on a well report should be documented from **top to bottom**, reflecting measurements relative to land surface. The correct reporting for the examples above should be:

- Backfill from 280 to 400 feet
- Filter pack from 30 to 75 feet

Taking a moment to review interval depths before submitting a report helps reduce avoidable deficiencies and ensures the information is complete and accurate. If a reviewer finds interval order reported incorrectly, the depths will be amended to reflect the top-down format.

For more information regarding the proper way to record data on a well report, please contact the regional well inspector responsible for the area where the well is located.

BENTONITE HYDRATION REQUIREMENTS

Recent well inspections have revealed several instances where bentonite seals were not properly hydrated. These issues have been found in both new well construction and well abandonment projects, highlighting the importance of following established hydration procedures.

For new well construction, any unhydrated bentonite placed in the annular seal must be **fully hydrated** from land surface using potable water before the drilling machine leaves the site. Hydration should begin only after all sealing material has been placed and must continue until the annular interval can no longer accept water, or until at least one full annular space volume of water has been added.

In well abandonment work, additional steps are required to promote effective sealing. Unhydrated bentonite should be placed through a minimum **1/4 inch mesh screen** to limit dust entering the sealing interval. In dry intervals located above the static water level, bentonite must be hydrated from land surface to a depth of at least **50 feet**. To allow proper activation, hydration should occur in lifts no greater than ten feet at a time, using potable water.

For monitoring wells and geotechnical borings, dry sealing intervals also require careful hydration. In these cases, bentonite should be hydrated with potable water in lifts no greater than **two feet at a time** to ensure proper activation and the formation of a reliable seal.

For additional information about bentonite requirements, please contact Tommy Laird, Well Construction Compliance Coordinator, at (503) 302-8618 or Tommy.K.Laird@water.oregon.gov.



MEET RYAN ANDREWS

Ryan Andrews joined the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) in January 2018 as the Instream and Drought Hydrologist. As of November 2022, he is now the Water Availability Program Coordinator. His current work involves leading the development of the Surface Water Information Modeling System (SWIMS), collaborating with many staff across the agency to conduct science, evaluate policy, and build applications to deliver information to support decision making.

Ryan's career has always been environmentally focused, though not always on water resources. To get his foot in the door of this competitive field, he took to the Bering Sea as a fisheries observer to monitor the catch aboard commercial fishing boats targeting pollock and Pacific cod. This was his first introduction to the Pacific Northwest, and once he was exposed, he knew his life goals

had changed. Following a stint in research on Lake Erie's aquatic ecosystem, he obtained his master's degree from Michigan State University by studying streams throughout Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsula. From there, he was fortunate to accept his first position at OWRD and call Oregon home.

Thankfully, Ryan's then-fiancée, now wife, agreed to tag along with their dog. They've since added another dog during the COVID times and a daughter shortly afterward. In his free time, you can find Ryan at the club listening to local DJs and appreciating the arts community. He loves going to the bouldering gym with his daughter and lounging at the winery with his wife. He is incredibly thankful to wake up and live in Oregon every day and to work for the benefit of the public trust of its citizens.

SUMMER SAFETY REMINDER



As temperatures rise, summer job-site conditions can quickly become hazardous for well drilling crews. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) identifies heat illness as one of the leading seasonal workplace risks, especially for outdoor industries like well drilling and pump installation.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can develop rapidly when working around drill rigs, compressors, welding equipment, and direct sunlight. Common warning signs include dizziness, heavy sweating, nausea, confusion, muscle cramps, and fatigue. If a worker becomes disoriented or stops sweating, seek emergency medical attention immediately.

To reduce risk, crews should follow OSHA's core heat safety practices:

- Drink water frequently—do not wait until you feel thirsty
- Take shaded or cooled rest breaks throughout the day
- Wear lightweight, breathable clothing and sun protection
- Schedule heavier tasks during cooler morning hours when possible
- Watch new or returning workers closely, as they may not be acclimated to the heat conditions

A safe crew is a productive crew. Taking a few extra precautions during hot weather can prevent injuries and lost work time throughout the drilling season.

For more information, please visit <https://www.osha.gov/heat>.

OSHA

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



New well in South Central Oregon



New well in Central Oregon



New well in SW Oregon



New well in Eastern Oregon

MORE PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



←
New monitoring wells
in Northwest Oregon



Water well with a deficient seal



Abandoned and new well in North Central Oregon



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