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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 PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Oregon Water Resources Department is excited to announce that Ryan Pillsbury was promoted to the position of Well Construction Program Coordinator effective July 21, 2026. He replaces Tommy Laird, who was promoted to Well Construction Compliance Coordinator in May 2026. In this new role, Ryan provides technical guidance and training to staff, supports the timely and accurate review of well reports, and works closely with the well construction industry on well construction compliance and Special Standards Requests.

Please direct all well construction questions, including requests for Special Standards, to Ryan at (971) 493-2012 or Ryan.C.Pillsbury@water.oregon.gov.

OCTOBER 2026 WELL CONSTRUCTOR EXAM

The next Well Constructor Exam is scheduled for October 12, 2026, at the Water Resources Department's (WRD) office in Salem. To sign up for the test, please complete an application to take the exam 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 WRD website under Licensing Exam Information, at <https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/GW/WL/WCC/resourcesforwellconstructors/Pages/Licensing-Examp-Information.aspx>

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

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

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK YOUR EMAIL



The Well Construction Section and well inspectors use email as the primary method of communication regarding well construction issues, licensing, and the Well Said Newsletter. Please check the email address associated with your well constructor license regularly so you don't miss important updates or requests for action. Be sure to review your spam or junk folders as well, in case messages from the Department are filtered there.

If your contact information changes, please remember to update it in the driller portal located on the Resources for Well Constructors webpage: https://apps.wrd.state.or.us/apps/gw/well_license_address_update/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fapps%2fgw%2fwell_license_address_update%2fDefault.aspx. Keeping your email address current and monitoring your inbox can help avoid delays in resolving well report deficiencies, renewing a license, receiving receipts for Start Cards and recording fees, and other important information. Please contact Buffy Madrigal-Adams at Buffy.M.Madrigal-Adams@water.oregon.gov or (971) 287-8305 if you have questions about updating your personal information online.

SEPTIC SYSTEM SETBACKS

Recently, the Department has found or been contacted about wells that do not meet the minimum setback requirements from septic tanks or drain fields. Most commonly, these issues involve wells that were drilled within 100 feet of the nearest septic drain line. Discovering these setback violations after a well has been constructed creates significant compliance issues and will require costly corrective action.

As a reminder, the well constructor is responsible for ensuring that the well location meets the minimum setbacks established in Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 690-210-0030 before drilling begins. If a well is found to be within the required setback from a septic tank or drain field, the Department will notify the well constructor and issue a repair or abandonment letter for the setback violation. To bring the well into compliance, the well must either be permanently abandoned, or the septic system must be abandoned and relocated to meet the required setback.

Well constructors should obtain a copy of the septic map from the county onsite septic program or Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) records and mark the drain line locations on site. If a septic map is unavailable, the drain lines should be located by excavation or sewer scope and flagged for visibility. Drain lines on neighboring properties may also need to be located if they are within setbacks. During summer, green patches in otherwise dead grass can indicate drain lines. Aerial images are another way to locate them. Well constructors should not rely on the landowner's knowledge to locate the septic system, as it may be unreliable.

For more information on setbacks, please contact Ryan Pillsbury, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (971) 493-2012 or Ryan.C.Pillsbury@water.oregon.gov.

SPECIAL STANDARDS - LACK OF ACCESS ABANDONMENTS

One of the most common Special Standard requests involves well abandonments where a drilling machine cannot access the well site. Access may be limited by buildings, structures, terrain, vegetation, or other site conditions. When Special Standards are required due to lack of access, the well constructor should have the local well inspector verify the access issue or provide photos that clearly show why the drilling machine cannot reach the well.

When submitting photos, multiple images should be provided rather than a single close-up. The photos should offer both context and detail, including:

- **Wide-angle photos of the surrounding area** - Show the general location of the well and any nearby features.
- **Photos of obstructions or access limitations** – Document any features or objects that prevent abandoning the well to minimum standards.
- **Photos showing the approach to the well** - Provide images that establish where the well is located on the property.
- **Photos of the immediate area around the well** – Capture the conditions surrounding the wellhead.
- **Photos taken from multiple angles** – Give a complete view of the well and its surroundings.

Well constructors should plan to meet the well inspector onsite to identify the well location and discuss any site conditions that prevent or complicate drilling machine access. If the well constructor cannot meet the inspector onsite, they should notify the landowner or client that the inspector may need to access the property and request that they show the inspector the well location. Additionally, if the site is gated, the well inspector should be provided with the gate code or any other necessary access information.

For more information on Special Standards, please contact Ryan Pillsbury, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (971) 493-2012 or Ryan.C.Pillsbury@water.oregon.gov.

MONITORING WELLS – FILTER PACK SEALS

Proper installation of monitoring well screens, filter packs, and filter pack seals is essential for collecting groundwater samples that are representative of conditions in the formation. The filter pack is intended to surround the screened section of the monitoring well and must consist of clean, chemically inert, well-rounded material. However, during well report reviews, the Department has identified instances where filter packs and filter pack seals do not meet the minimum requirements of Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 690-240-0460.

The filter pack may not extend more than three feet above the top of the screen or more than one foot below the bottom of the screen. The Department has commonly found filter packs extending beyond these allowable limits. This is a construction deficiency, and the well does not meet minimum construction standards. What this also means is that when the well is abandoned, it will be required to be over-drilled as it was not constructed to minimum well construction standards.

Another important component of monitoring well construction is the filter pack seal. The filter pack seal provides separation between the filter pack and the annular seal, helping prevent grout from infiltrating the filter pack. When grout or grout slurry is used as the annular seal, the filter pack seal must consist of one of the following:

- A two-foot-thick layer of fine-grained sand above the filter pack; or
- A minimum of a three-foot-thick layer of dry bentonite that must be adequately hydrated before placing the annular seal

Proper placement of the filter pack and filter pack seal is essential to meeting Oregon's minimum well construction standards and ensuring the monitoring well can provide reliable groundwater data.

For more information on monitoring well filter pack seals, please contact Ryan Pillsbury, Well Construction Program Coordinator, at (971) 493-2012 or Ryan.C.Pillsbury@water.oregon.gov.

FREE WELL WATER TESTING FOR LOWER UMATILLA RESIDENTS

Well constructors are a trusted resource for domestic well owners and can help emphasize the importance of routine well-water testing. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) encourages residents in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA), covering northern Morrow County and northwestern Umatilla County, to test their well water for nitrates. OHA monitoring shows that nitrate levels in this area are elevated, and that the levels tend to be higher during the summer months.

The LUBGWMA was established because groundwater in the region has consistently elevated nitrate concentrations. Nitrate levels above 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) may be unsafe for drinking, especially for infants and people who may be pregnant. OHA provides free nitrate testing to households within the LUBGWMA. Households with results above 10 mg/L may also be eligible for assistance, such as free water delivery or an in-home reverse-osmosis treatment system, depending on their nitrate level.

Well constructors working in the area are encouraged to share this information with customers and remind well owners that regular water-quality testing is an essential part of domestic well maintenance.

Residents can request a free nitrate test by contacting the OHA Domestic Well Safety Program at (541) 952-9254 or Domestic.Wells@odhsoha.oregon.gov.

Additional details and answers to frequently asked questions are available on the OHA website: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/healthyenvironments/drinkingwater/sourcewater/domesticwellsafety/pages/lubgwma-frequently-asked-questions.aspx>

MEET ADAIR MUTH

Adair Muth stepped into the role of Grants Manager in August 2024, after joining the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) in 2021 as a Grant Analyst and later serving as a Grant Coordinator. She now leads the team responsible for managing OWRD's two well funds: the Well Abandonment, Repair and Replacement Fund and the Harney Domestic Well Remediation Fund.

Before coming to OWRD, Adair managed a grant program supporting fish habitat restoration for Idaho's Office of Species Conservation. *Continued next page*



MEET ADAIR MUTH, cont'd

Her career also includes work in project planning, community engagement, and field data collection with the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program, King County Wastewater Treatment Division, and several seasonal roles with the U.S. Forest Service. Adair holds a Master of Public Administration from Boise State University and bachelor's degrees in Conservation Biology and Spanish from the University of Idaho. As a Fulbright Scholar, she spent a year in the Galapagos Islands researching an invasive fly species with the Charles Darwin Research Station.

Adair lives in Milwaukie with her husband and two daughters and enjoys exploring Oregon's outdoors and restoring her yard with native plants. She is grateful for the opportunity to serve Oregonians through her work at OWRD.

For questions about the Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund, or the Harney Domestic Well Remediation Fund, contact OWRD.Well.Funding@water.oregon.gov.

ALKALI LAKE

Alkali Lake sits about 60 miles north of Lakeview in Oregon's high desert. At first glance, it looks like a quiet, dry basin, not the kind of place one would associate with hazardous waste or the Vietnam War. Yet it holds one of Oregon's more unusual environmental stories.

In 1969, a company from Beaverton began using land near the lake to store and dispose of chemical waste. Over the next few years, around 25,000 drums, each holding 55 gallons, were shipped to the site. These barrels contained leftover materials from herbicides like 2,4-D and MCPA, chlorophenols, metallic chloride waste, paint, and solvents. Although the site never received Agent Orange, it did receive MCPA, a related herbicide used during the same era.

By 1971, after leaks and other improper handling were discovered, the state stopped allowing more waste to be shipped in. The company couldn't meet cleanup requirements, so Oregon eventually took over the property.

By 1976, the state faced thousands of deteriorating, leaking barrels. The cleanup method used back then was very different from what would be allowed today: workers crushed the drums with heavy equipment, collected the spilled waste in shallow, unlined trenches, and covered everything with soil and gravel.

Later testing showed that chemicals had seeped into the groundwater under the trenches and spread west and northwest. This is an important lesson for anyone working with wells or groundwater. A disposal site might only occupy a few acres on the surface, but the groundwater below can carry contaminants much farther. Once chemicals enter groundwater, they move according to the natural subsurface flow of water underground. For decades, monitoring wells have tracked how the contamination behaves over time. Today, the site is still actively managed through water sampling, maintenance of the soil cover, controlled site access, and other safety measures.

More than 50 years after the first barrels arrived, the surface shows little evidence of what happened. But groundwater keeps a long memory. Alkali Lake serves as a reminder that activities on the surface can affect what lies underground for generations, and that understanding how groundwater flows is essential to protecting this vital resource.

FIRE WATCH



Well construction work often involves welding, cutting, grinding, drilling, and operating large equipment. These activities can be hazardous, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements are designed to help prevent injuries, fires, and other incidents. OSHA's rules for welding, cutting, and other hot work require employers to take specific precautions to prevent fires when combustible materials or conditions are present. When normal fire-prevention measures are not enough, a designated fire watch may be required.

A fire watch should understand the hazards in the work area and have the proper firefighting equipment readily available. They must remain in the area during work, and when necessary, stay afterward long enough to ensure that no smoldering fires develop. Before beginning hot work:

- Remove or protect combustible materials in the work area.
- Check the area for flammable materials, including vegetation, fuels, oils, and other debris.
- Keep appropriate fire-extinguishing equipment immediately available.
- Make sure the person assigned to fire watch understands their responsibilities.
- Follow applicable OSHA requirements, site-specific procedures, and local fire restrictions.



A fire watch is not simply someone standing nearby. The person needs to remain attentive to the work area and be prepared to take immediate action if a fire starts. OSHA compliance is an important part of workplace safety, but safety starts before the equipment is turned on or the torch is lit. Take a few minutes before starting work to identify potential fire and other hazards.

For more information, please see <https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.252>.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



New monitoring well in North Central Oregon



German Shepherd overseeing a landowner permit well installation



New well in Southwest Oregon



Monitoring well beside National Guard flight line



New well near Baker City



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WELL SAID NEWSLETTER - Oregon Water Resources Dept Oct 2026 – Issue 85

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