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How United Efforts Regain Lost Funding for Abandoned Well Program

Groundwater Guardian Featured ROA

By Christine Spitzley, Greater Lansing Area Groundwater Guardian Team
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No Funding!" was not a phrase that local Groundwater Guardian Communities were going to accept when they were told their Abandoned Well Program would not be moving forward. After receiving funding from the state of Michigan to locate and close abandoned wells in wellhead protection areas, being told that funding had been put on hold, indefinitely, did not go over well.

These communities had received approval for grants totaling \$585,000 to seal approximately 600 wells. After a two year effort which included locating over 600 wells and obtaining cost estimates from local well drillers, the state of Michigan suspended the release of grant funds without explanation or warning.

The communities involved in this effort are known as the Capital Area Groundwater Alliance, or CAGA. CAGA is comprised of Lansing Area Communities involved in the Wellhead Protection (WHP) Program throughout the state of Michigan. It was created to improve the organization of local efforts, develop an identity for WHP communities, and to unite their relationships in a joint effort. Other activities undertaken by CAGA include joint education and outreach campaigns, and contaminant source inventories.

The first priority of the Abandoned Well Program effort was to identify and recognize abandoned wells as a potential threat to the quality of drinking water supplies. Later in the program, surveys were completed with homeowners living in well-head protection areas to mark

possible abandoned wells that could be closed through the program. Twelve thousand homes were visited and six hundred wells have been identified. This averages out to approximately one abandoned well for every twenty homes included in the five communities surveyed.

Message Makers, a local public relations firm, was hired to help bring more awareness and education to citizens. Part of this work included a web page and toll

were given and television spots were produced—all in an effort to raise awareness among the communities involved.

An engineering consulting firm, Malcolm Pirnie, was also hired by CAGA to guide them through the confusing process of creating, releasing, and managing project cost estimation documents and to aid in the process of selecting a qualified well driller. The firm created bid proposals to be sent out to well drillers

throughout the state in order to obtain good, qualified cost estimates in compliance with the grant requirements.

In July, 2002, the state halted funding due to the lack of bonds from the state and the program was abruptly halted mid way.

Well drillers were notified that

funding had been revoked and the program was put on hold, indefinitely. Local newspapers covered the story. Citizens became upset at the loss of assistance in closing their wells.

Citizens, utilities, and local governments joined together and wrote letters to

newspapers and legislators to raise awareness on the issue. As a result of these united efforts, funding for the project has recently been "re-released". All \$585,000 of it!

Addendums were sent out to well drillers informing them that the bidding process was re-instated. Bids are currently under review for their qualifications and responsiveness to the bid requirements. The three lowest bids will be sent to the state, and once approved, well closures will begin this fall.

In addition, Malcolm Pirnie will also oversee the work of the well drillers once the bids are awarded. They will make site inspections and work with the drillers to insure they use proper techniques and have the proper documentation for each closure.

With a second round of funding anticipated, other local Groundwater Guardian Communities anticipate joining this effort to close abandoned wells. They look forward to continuing to locate and seal abandoned wells in the Lansing Area as well as educating citizens in the importance of this irreplaceable drinking water resource.

For more information on this project, contact Christine Spitzley at 517-393-0342 or visit the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission website at www.tri-co.org.



▲ A local well driller closes an abandoned well located in Lansing Township.

free hotline that provides information to citizens on the proper sealing of their abandoned wells. Bill stuffers were printed and sent out with water bills; fliers and hats were made. Billboards were created to be posted in the Lansing area. Radio interviews with spokespeople from CAGA

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