

## Action Idea

# Test Your Well Night

Are you ready to take action? Are you ready to get others involved in drinking water protection? This community outreach effort has been used successfully by various groups in Nebraska concerned about nitrate levels of drinking water in private wells. It's simple to organize and run. Volunteer groups, student groups, service organizations, or other interested groups or individuals can organize this event.

### Project Goals

1. Test wells for unsafe nitrate levels.
2. Provide information about nitrate levels and other issues to those who use private wells.
3. Provide pollution prevention steps well users can take to protect their water supplies.

### Project Steps

1. Identify and contact possible partners for the event. These could include city/county government, state/local health department, a Natural Resources District, a local Groundwater Guardian team, volunteer groups, high school classes or student organizations.
2. Determine a date and location for the activity. A community hall, church hall, school or other prominent and easily accessible location works well. These events are often scheduled for a Saturday morning or weeknight around 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., but tailor the event to fit your community.
3. Publicize your event through any affordable means you think will reach your target audience. Consider press releases, radio or newspaper advertising (paid or donated), school newspapers, and/or flyers posted in the community. Flyers mailed directly to targeted homes are usually very effective. City or county governments may be helpful in getting addresses for a mailing. If possible, get the endorsement of your village, city or county board and ask for its help in promoting the event. Be creative—one organizer sent flyers home with school children who live on the bus routes of the targeted homes.
4. Set up for your event. You may want seating and/or light refreshments if people will have to wait briefly for test results or to speak to someone. Have one or two people designated as greeters to welcome people as they come in and explain your process. Have copies of forms people will need to fill out to accompany their water samples. The form may be as simple as a person's name and the test number you assign to it, or it could ask for more information if you like.

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For more information contact your local health department or The Groundwater Foundation.



The Groundwater Foundation  
P.O. Box 22558  
Lincoln, NE 68516  
402-434-2740 or 1-800-858-4844  
[www.groundwater.org](http://www.groundwater.org)

## Action Idea: Test Your Well Night

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1. Community members bring in their water samples in any clean container. The instruction to bring in a sample in any clean container should be part of your advertising. You'll want to be sure to say how large a water sample a person should bring in.
2. Water samples are tested. Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) has worked very successfully with student groups who learn about water quality testing in science class and then do the testing during a community event. LLCHD used water quality grant funds to buy Hach colorimeters that will test for many different chemicals. However, inexpensive paper strips can also be used to test for nitrate levels.
3. Test results are noted in writing and given to the person who brought in the sample, possibly along with other appropriate written materials, such as information about nitrates or proper well maintenance. If the nitrate level exceeds 10 parts per million (ppm), LLCHD has found it helpful to have a staff member give the results to the community member, along with handouts that present information about potential health effects of high nitrate levels, and options for dealing with high nitrate levels. LLCHD also recommends testing by a laboratory for any sample that exceeds 5 ppm because of the margin of error of their testing equipment. As part of its water quality grant, LLCHD offers to pick up a sample of any water containing nitrates over 10 ppm for free testing.
4. It may be helpful to have a staff member from your local health department or other person with expertise about drinking water and wells on hand to answer questions. For example, you may be asked about coliform contamination or ways to protect drinking water.
5. LLCHD uses the following format for its events: Community members are greeted by a friendly student who welcomes them to the event and directs or escorts them to several students seated at a table. The students at the table take the sample and complete the paperwork for the sample. The community member is then invited to have refreshments or have a seat while their sample is being tested, which they are told will take 10-15 minutes. Community members are also given a pollution prevention brochure or other appropriate information to read while they are waiting. After the test is completed the results are given to the community member, along with a copy of UNL Cooperative Extension's NebGuide "Drinking Water: Nitrate-Nitrogen." Depending on the accuracy of the test being used, if the results are over 5 ppm, the individual is encouraged to have the water tested by a laboratory. If the results are over 10 ppm, the individual is cautioned not to allow infants or nursing mothers to consume the water, and bottled water is also suggested for all other water users. If the results are over 15 ppm, the individual is encouraged to seek another water supply. The person sharing this information with the community member is sensitive to privacy concerns the community member may have, and also tries to match the strength of his recommendations to the nitrate level in the water.

Special thanks to John Chess, LLCHD, students, and faculty and Norris High School for their involvement and leadership in Test Your Well Night.

There are many sources for water testing equipment and supplies. Two widely used suppliers are:

Hach Company  
P.O. Box 92912  
Loveland CO 80539-0389  
1-800-227-4224

Ward's Earth Science  
P.O. Box 389  
Rochester, NY 14692-9012  
1-800-962-2660