

How Do You Abandon “Lost” Groundwater Monitoring Wells?

During cleanups at contaminated properties, groundwater monitoring wells occasionally become “lost” due to heavy equipment destroying the above-ground portion of the well. Lost monitoring wells may cause delays with cleanups because the DNR encourages parties seeking site closure to properly abandon all wells, and they pose an environmental risk because the wells’ unsealed casings in the soil provide a path for surface pollutants to reach groundwater.

If a well becomes “lost,” DNR’s Remediation and Redevelopment Program (RR) staff first review actions that responsible parties (RPs) have taken to locate the well, and may require more aggressive actions, such as asphalt removal or small excavations in the area where the well might be located.

Since the DNR requires RPs to survey all monitoring wells, the well location should be known to a fair degree of accuracy. If RR staff are satisfied that the well cannot be found and abandoned in accordance with the requirements of NR 141.25, Wis. Adm. Code, the RR Program will approve a case closure request if other requirements to complete the cleanup have been satisfied. In this situation, DNR’s closure letter will require the monitoring well be properly abandoned as soon as it is found, even if the property has changed hands.

Previously, DNR recorded deed notices with the county to notify the public about lost monitoring wells. However, due to recent changes in legislation, the DNR now only posts this information on the GIS Registry, located at the following link: dnrmaps.wisconsin.gov/imf/imf.jsps?site=brts.gisregistry. Any GIS Registry information submitted to DNR will need to include two new items when a monitoring well needs to be abandoned. Consultants should include the following in their packet of GIS Registry information:

- 1) a site location map with all surveyed well locations, with the specified well identified, and
- 2) a well construction report for the monitoring well that was not properly abandoned. Responsible parties with lost monitoring wells will also need to pay a \$250 GIS Registry fee, unless the parties have already paid the due to residual groundwater contamination on the property.

If the monitoring well was located on a property owned by someone other than the RP, the RP should also inform the other property owner, prior to requesting closure with the

DNR, that the well will need to be properly abandoned when it is located. The other property owner may then elect to enter into an agreement with the RP stating that, if the well is discovered at a later date, the RP will pay the costs to properly abandon it. This type of private agreement may also be useful when the RP that is conducting the cleanup is not the property owner (e.g., a tenant that is conducting a cleanup may agree to abandon a lost monitoring well that is discovered at a later date). However, if there is no such agreement, the owner of the property is responsible for properly abandoning wells that are discovered after closure.