

FIVE GOOD REASONS TO DECOMMISSION ABANDONED WELLS

Abandoned well-- A well that is no longer in use or is in such a state of disrepair that groundwater can no longer be pumped from it in useable quantities.

Reason #1 GROUNDWATER / WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION --- Abandoned wells that have not been properly decommissioned provide a direct channel for contaminants stored or spilled above ground to move into aquifers being used for drinking water supply. Soil and its biological inhabitants have a remarkable ability to break down some potential groundwater contaminants. Confining beds of clay also serve as natural barriers and aid in protection of deeper aquifers. However, when contaminants enter an open well, they circumvent the normal filtering action of the soil layers or the protection offered by the clay layers and can pollute the groundwater. Almost all Mississippi communities use groundwater as their source of drinking water. An abandoned well may provide a direct path or conduit for contaminants to enter the aquifer providing their water supply. To insure an abundant supply of safe groundwater for future generations, we must conserve and safeguard this resource today. The proper decommissioning of abandoned wells will have an immediate and long-term impact on the protection of this resource.

Reason #2 SAFETY --- Abandoned wells are physical hazards to people and animals. These wells are potentially dangerous because many are open holes in the ground that may be hidden by vegetation. Unsecured objects such as pieces of old plywood or sheet metal that offer little protection may cover some of these wells. Still others may have had secured covers over the well casing at one time but the covers are either missing now or are in such disrepair that they no longer provide any measure of safety. There have been a number of nationally publicized cases like the one described below in which people, and particularly children, have fallen into open abandoned wells.

EASLEY, S. C. ---- It looked like an ordinary snake hole in the front yard of her home, so Betty Lou Morton decided to poke it with a broom handle. A split second later, Morton fell 45 feet into a 2-foot-wide void. The 27-year-old woman spent the next three hours trapped in the hole until her rescue Monday evening. Morton could see brick around her, but worried there would be a cave-in.

Morton suspects the hole was an abandoned well and considers it a small miracle her daughters, ages 8 and 11, didn't stumble into it during the dozens of times they walked over the site. (Article from the Daily Herald, January 29, 1999)

Once an abandoned well is properly decommissioned, there is no possibility of someone or something falling into it.

Reason #3 POTENTIAL LIABILITY --- A landowner can potentially be held liable for accidents or groundwater contamination, which may be caused by an abandoned well. The Mississippi *Surface Water and Groundwater Use and Protection Regulations* require that the owner of a well properly decommission it within ninety (90) days of its abandonment. A landowner who ignores these regulations would have little defense against a claim that negligence caused or contributed to a personal injury or to groundwater contamination.

Reason #4 RESPONSIBLE TRANSFER OF TITLE TO LAND --- Under the Mississippi *Surface Water and Groundwater Use and Protection Regulations*, a well must be sealed within ninety (90) days of its abandonment. If a person purchases a piece of land and later finds an abandoned well on the property, the new owner would be responsible for decommissioning the well or would be exposed to the potential liability of owning an abandoned well and failing to comply with the state's regulations. A responsible transfer of title to property should include full disclosure of the presence of all wells, including those that are in operation, those that are no longer in use, and those that have been properly decommissioned.

Reason #5 PEACE OF MIND --- Decommissioning abandoned wells can bring responsible well owners and their neighbors peace of mind from knowing that an open well no longer poses a threat to their children's immediate physical well being or their future supply of clean drinking water.