Recommendations for Private Wells Inundated by Flooding

If you live in an area that was recently or is currently flooded, your private well may be in danger of contamination from pollutants carried in the floodwaters. Bacteria, chemicals and other contaminants contained in floodwaters can enter the top of your well, seep down its casing, or migrate underground to your well via a neighbor’s flooded well. Such contamination can make your well water unsafe for drinking, cooking and food preparation.

You should suspect contamination if your well cap has been underwater; if you notice taste, color or sediment changes in your water; or if your well is shallow-cased and you are near areas that have been flooded. Wells in pits or basements are also susceptible to contamination.

What to do with my well following a flood

1. **Stop using your water and switch to a safe water source**
   If you suspect your private well is contaminated, immediately stop drinking it or using it for cooking and preparing food. Switch to a known safe source such as a neighbor’s well if you know it is safe, a community water supply, or buy bottled water. If you can’t find a convenient source of safe water, boil your well water for one minute at a rolling boil before using it. **You should not begin using the water for drinking and cooking until a water test indicates that your well is bacteriologically safe.**

2. **Disinfect well and entire plumbing system once the water has subsided**
   This procedure is best done by a licensed well driller or pump installer with the expertise and equipment. Well owners may disinfect their well and plumbing system themselves by carefully following specific procedures*. If you are unsure of how to disinfect, it is better to call a licensed well driller or pump installer.

   * The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides two useful brochures in order to complete well disinfection. One is titled “Bacteriological Contamination of Drinking Water Wells” and the other is titled “Well Chlorination in Arsenic Sensitive Areas” and can be found on the DNR website (http://dnr.wi.gov).

3. **Test your well for coliform bacteria**
   Before using your well again, have the water tested for total coliform bacteria by a certified laboratory (Outagamie County Public Health Division is a certified laboratory). You should not use your well for drinking, cooking or food preparation until you obtain a safe coliform bacteria test. If you live in an area that experienced flooding but are unsure that your well was compromised, you should still test your well to make sure that is safe.

If you have any questions about your well or water quality, please call Outagamie County Public Health Division at (920) 832-5100.