

Wildfire Can Damage Private Water Wells

Information for Water Well Owners After a Wildfire

As an owner of a private domestic water well that may be damaged by a wildfire, you may have some concerns about fire related impacts to your well and water system.

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) recommends the well owner perform a visual inspection of their well and water system, including the piping and plumbing that provide water to and throughout your home. Items that you should check include:

Your Water Well

If you see any of the following damage, you should contact a MDH-licensed well contractor to assess any damage and make repairs.

- Damage to electrical wires and connectors that supply power to your well.
- Damage to the well casing and any above-ground piping used with the well to bring water to your home.
- Damage to well houses and equipment such as chlorinators, water treatment equipment, and electronic controls.
- Damage to pressure tanks which could have been caused by exposure to excessive heat.
- Damage to storage tanks, vents, and overflow pipes.

Water Taste and Odors

You may notice that your water tastes or smells earthy, smoky, or burnt. If so, you may need to thoroughly flush your water lines.

Inside Your Home

To the extent you can, visually check the water-supply system, including plumbing, for any damage, signs of leaks, or changes in operation. You should check to see if your well and plumbing system maintained positive pressure during the fire. This can be done by simply turning on a faucet in the household to see if water flows. You should not hear any air being released from the faucet. The flow of water should be steady and uninterrupted. If you do hear air escaping from the faucet with water intermittently spurting out when it is turned on, that is an indication that your well and household plumbing had a loss of pressure and may have been damaged.

If You've Had Loss of Water Pressure

If your visual inspection shows that there was a loss of pressure or the water system has been damaged, it is likely that your water may be contaminated with bacteria. Damaged components should be repaired or replaced. Anytime a water system loses pressure, the water should be tested for the presence of bacteria before it is used for drinking or cooking. Anytime the well or water system is repaired, it should be disinfected after a repair is made and then tested to ensure the water is safe for drinking or cooking.

Testing Your Well for Bacteria

When testing drinking water for the presence of bacteria, it is necessary to collect a sample and deliver it to a MDH-certified laboratory. For a list of all MDH-certified laboratories, see MDH Environmental Laboratory website or call MDH Well Management Section at 651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808. You can also look in your local Yellow Pages under "Laboratories – Testing." Bacteria samples must be collected in an approved container provided by the laboratory. When collecting a sample, follow the instructions that come with the bottle and return the sample bottle to the laboratory in the recommended time.

- [MDH Environmental Laboratory \(www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/labsearch).

Using Your Water While You Wait for Test Results

You can use your water for showering and flushing toilets. Take care to avoid swallowing water from showers or baths. You should not use your water for drinking or cooking purposes unless you have boiled or disinfected it. This caution includes not washing dishes or other cooking utensils in it. While you are waiting to receive the results of bacteria testing, you can boil the water you will be using for drinking and cooking for at least 1 minute at a full rolling boil.

You can also disinfect your well and water system while waiting for sample results. If the well tests positive for the presence of coliform bacteria, you should have the well and water system disinfected. Instructions for disinfecting wells can be found in the MDH Well Management Section publication, Well Disinfection on our website or call MDH Well Management Section at 651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808.

- [Well Disinfection \(www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells/waterquality/disinfection.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells/waterquality/disinfection.html).

Reference:

Some information is from the state of Arizona website.

- [Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Water Quality Division: Safe Drinking Water \(www.azdeq.gov/environ/water/dw\)](http://www.azdeq.gov/environ/water/dw).

Minnesota Department of Health District Offices:

Bemidji: 218-308-2100	Duluth: 218-302-6166	Fergus Falls: 218-332-5150
Mankato: 507-344-2700	Marshall: 507-537-7151	Rochester: 507-206-2700
St. Cloud: 320-223-7300	St. Paul: 651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808	