
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Water Supply Options During Drought

Symptoms of Well Failure

Typically, dug wells, shallow bedrock wells, wells located near topographic high points and wells constructed in areas where bedrock is close to the ground surface are more susceptible to failure when drought conditions are present. The typical homeowner does not have a means of determining a well's water level, although symptoms of well failure may be obvious. Symptoms may include:

- No water.
- Sudden drops in water pressure or pressure surges.
- Air bubbles coming out of non-aerated faucets.
- Cloudy or heavily silted water.

The cause of well failure may be a shortage of water or other problems associated with the well casing, valves, waterlines, pumps or pressure tanks. It is important to work with a licensed pump installer and/or well driller to diagnose the problem and determine the appropriate corrective action to take.

If you are experiencing any of the above issues in your water system, turn the pump off to prevent your pump from continuously pumping air and burning itself out. A water pump can be turned off from a home's electrical panel. Also, address issues immediately because completing the work in the winter may not be possible or could be costlier.

Private Well Information

Since 1984, well drillers have been required to fill out and submit a well completion report for each well they construct. Records for wells may be found through "OneStop" at www.des.nh.gov or by contacting the NHDES Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau. Records of wells constructed prior to 1984 may be available from the original well driller or pump contractors that previously provided maintenance on the well or pump.

WELL DEFINITIONS

- **Dug wells** are commonly 3- or 4-foot diameter wells constructed by excavation and are lined with fieldstone or, if more recent construction, inter-locking concrete tile. Dug wells are usually not much deeper than 15 feet below land surface. These wells are generally easy to identify in your yard because they are relatively large stone or concrete objects protruding from the ground and many have well houses built over them for protection or ornamental purposes.

- **Drilled bedrock wells** are almost always 6-inch diameter wells drilled through the unconsolidated earth deposits into the upper surface of the bedrock and cased with steel pipe. These wells tap water from fractures deep in the bedrock and range in depth from less than 100 feet to more than 1,000 feet. Drilled bedrock wells can be easily identified as a capped, 6-inch steel pipe sticking out of the ground.

Well Improvement Options

A licensed well driller or licensed pump installer will be able to assist you with determining if your water supply is diminishing, troubleshooting other well issues and recommending actions to help remedy the problem. A list of [licensed well contractors](#) may be found through “OneStop” at des.nh.gov.

In New Hampshire, most residents on private wells have a dug well or a bedrock well. If your well is failing due to lack of supply, below are options that may help mitigate the issue and factors you should discuss with a licensed well driller or licensed pump installer.

- Lower the pump or pump intake into the bedrock or dug well to access more usable storage. As lowering the pump means the pump will have to work harder, a larger pump may be necessary. There are also potential water quality issues that could occur as a result of lowering the pump.
- Increase the atmospheric tank size to provide additional water storage. For a well with a slow recovery rate, the additional storage will reduce demands on the well during high water use periods and store water extracted from the well during lower use periods.
- Deepen the existing well to increase the yield of the well. The yield of a bedrock well will only increase if new water-bearing fractures are encountered. A dug well can only be deepened if it is not underlain by bedrock. Driving a steel rod into the bottom of a dug well is a common test to determine if bedrock is present. Deepening a bedrock or dug well coupled with lowering the level of the pump will increase the volume water that is available during high demand periods and increase the amount of water that can be stored during periods of low demand as the water level in the well recovers.
- Construct a new well to be used in tandem with or replace an existing water source. It is advisable to check the well database on OneStop with respect to the depths and yields of other wells in the area, to determine if there is good chance of a new well supplying the yield needed.
- Purchase water tanks that may be filled by a bulk water hauler. NHDES maintains a list of bulk water haulers that provide drinking water in compliance with rules of NHDES.
- Hydro-fracture the existing bedrock well to increase yield by flushing out and opening fractures in surrounding rock to increase water flow. Factors to discuss with a licensed well driller/pump installer include:
 - If the well was previously developed by hydro-fracturing and the yield has again diminished, a second attempt to hydro-fracture may be initially successful, but it will likely not be sustained over time.
 - It is recommended that shallow bedrock wells be deepened to 400 or 500 feet to obtain additional supply prior to considering hydro-fracturing. This provides adequate surface area in the well borehole to develop deeper and more sustainable water-bearing fractures, providing

a good chance of increasing yield.

- A completely dry hole is not a great candidate for hydro-fracturing because the well must have some water-bearing fractures to start with.

Safety and Sanitation

All wells should be disinfected after completing any of the above work. See the fact sheet [WD-DWGB-4-11 Disinfecting a Drinking Water Well](#).

Sharing water between homes by interconnecting two homes' plumbing systems can create a contamination risk. If using water from a neighbor's home, do not use water from a hose for drinking or cooking, as the hose may have bacteria in it, as well as other contaminants. Hose water may be used for bathing, washing clothes, cleaning and flushing toilets.

NHDES does not recommend filling wells with water delivered by a tanker truck. If wells are filled with delivered water, the water must meet drinking water standards and the tank of the delivery truck needs to be sanitary and appropriate for use for potable water. Filling wells with water that does not meet drinking water standards is a violation of Underground Injection Control regulations. NHDES notes that filling dry wells with water is usually ineffective in providing a sustained water supply and could damage the well and contaminate groundwater.

Financing

There is limited financial assistance available explicitly to assist with mitigating a problem with a private water system. Households should identify savings or other financing options for addressing failed water supply wells. Below is one financial assistance option for very low income households:

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Home Repair Loan/Grant Application Section 504 provides private well financial assistance to people who live in rural communities (population less than 20,000) and make less than 50% of the median household income in the area. In some instances, grants are available to people that are over the age of 62. Concord Office of the USDA can be contacted by telephone at (603) 223-6035 for more information regarding the availability of funds to assist with water supply shortages in a privately owned water supply.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit www.des.nh.gov.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of August 2019. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.