

Ground water and private wells, a Maine perspective

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Around 40% of the citizens of Maine receive their domestic water supply from a private well, the vast majority of these being drilled bedrock wells. Aside from setback requirements from septic systems and licensure of drillers, there is little regulatory oversight of private wells. There are no requirements for testing water quality, except for those that might be required by a financial institution during a real estate transaction. Arsenic and other contaminants related to geology are significant concerns. Anthropogenic contamination in private wells from small spills often go undetected. In spite of well-publicized campaigns to urge well owners to test their wells, a majority of private wells remain untested.

In recent years there has been a policy focus on ground water, largely driven by the perception that large-scale withdrawals for water bottling are compromising Maine's ground water resource. In the 2009 session, Legislators heard more than a dozen bills on ground water, all focused on bottled water from one angle or another. While private well owners have raised concerns that this water bottling is depleting Maine's aquifers, this is a highly regulated activity with the goal to ensure sustainable use with limited impact on other water-dependent uses.