



2008 USDA-CSREES National Water Conference  
Sparks, NV

**New England Private Well Initiative**

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**Abstract Text:**

For the 25 percent of New Englanders who rely on private wells for their drinking water, the quality of water in their own backyards is paramount. The New England Private Well Initiative, a product of multiple states and agencies and coordinated regionally, educates private well owners about potential man-made and naturally occurring contaminant risks to their wells and offers advice to protect against these risks. This focus area channels the Land Grant Universities' expertise housed in Home\*A\*Syst, Watershed Stewards and Master Gardener programs to private well owners. Team members work with residents, volunteers and professionals - including realtors and well contractors - to increase the ability of New Englanders to make informed decisions about the quality of water in their own backyards.

**Partnerships**

A diverse array of partners share the belief that informed residents can make effective decisions to protect the water in their own wells. Experts from organizations ranging from the U.S. EPA New England to Dartmouth College's Toxic Metals Research Program and the Water Systems Council pool their knowledge and resources to bring the latest in science to concerned citizens and professionals.

**Impact Statement:**

**Selected Accomplishments**

Working with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and U.S. EPA New England, eight of the original private well protection factsheets developed at the University of Rhode Island have been adapted for Massachusetts and placed online for broad distribution. An additional 15 factsheets are currently being developed.

In partnership with U.S. EPA New England, the Water Systems Council, New England's state drinking water agencies, Dartmouth University and others, the 2005 New England Private Well Water Symposium was held in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and provided a forum for professionals to share current research, approaches and materials. Almost 100 individuals attended from a cross-section of federal, state, university, nonprofit and private sector groups. Ninety-five percent of 36 post-event survey respondents reported a significant increase in knowledge in at least one of the symposium topic areas. This event is planned again for December 2007 in Newport, Rhode Island.

With funding made possible by the U.S. EPA New England, not only homeowners, but volunteers like Master Gardeners, and professionals including realtors, are now well-versed in private well protection practices. Realtors, for example, can refer to the resource guide *What Every Realtor Should Know About Private Drinking Water Wells*, developed for the New England Region.

**Adopted Practices**

- Ninety-one percent of survey respondents from the 2005 New England Private Well Water Symposium agreed that it helped them effectively exchange ideas about private well water issues. Eighty-

four percent of these participants planned to contact at least one expert at the event within the year; and 97 percent wanted to see the symposium become a regular event.

Thousands of individuals have had their well water tested. Evaluations from the University of Rhode Island Home\*A\*Syst Program indicate that 55 percent of workshop attendees now test their water, and 63 percent share well program information with others. And in Massachusetts, more than 800 brochures provided by the University of Massachusetts were distributed by Massachusetts Boards of Health to private well owners. More than 20 percent of those who received Initiative brochures from the Massachusetts Boards of Health had their well water tested.