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The WELL EDUCATED Program: Guiding private well owners through testing and interpreting their water quality

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Abstract Text:

Annual drinking water testing is an important practice to screen for water quality exceedances that may be detrimental to human health. The WELL EDUCATED Program provides a mechanism to test private well water primarily used for drinking. Drinking water parameters significantly targeted include coliform presence and nitrate + nitrite as N. Multiple test packages are also available for a variety of constituents, including irrigation and livestock suitability. WELL EDUCATED water testing kits, along with instructional materials, are made publicly available through collaboration with county offices. Water test results and interpretive materials are mailed to each program participant. Interpretive materials create private well owner awareness on well maintenance and upkeep while providing easy to understand information on test results and handling exceedances.

To assess program effectiveness, a basic survey is included with the WELL EDUCATED Program registration sheet. Upon program completion, a follow up survey is distributed to randomly selected participants assessing outcomes and impacts of program participation on private well water awareness and maintenance.

During the 2007 program year, roughly 300 well owners or users participated in the program from 15 different counties around the state of Montana. Water quality parameters and potential trends can be tracked and identified through the database, which may be especially significant for parameters exceeding drinking water standards.

Impact Statement:

Through the program, well owner education on water quality results and well maintenance is achieved through interpretive materials distributed to the participant. There are reduced risks of health related problems linked to compromised water quality. Long term impacts of the project include a record of private well water results throughout Montana that can be entered into a database as well as can be used for mapping water quality parameters throughout the state.