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The 2008 WELL EDUCATED Program and Case Study: Guiding private well owners through testing and interpreting their water quality

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Abstract:

It is an important practice to annually screen for water quality exceedances in private well water that may be detrimental to human health. The WELL Educated Program provides a mechanism to test private well water primarily used for human consumption. This program empowers private well owners to monitor, assess, and treat the quality of their drinking water where necessary. Drinking water parameters significantly targeted include the presence of coliform and nitrate + nitrite as N. Multiple test packages are also available for a variety of constituents, including irrigation and livestock suitability. The WELL Educated program provides water testing kits, along with instructional materials, made publicly available through collaboration with local 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. Water quality data is housed in a database where potential trends can be tracked and identified, which may be especially significant for parameters exceeding drinking water standards. To assess program effectiveness, a basic survey is included with the WELL Educated Program registration sheet providing information such as well depth, land use, and geographic coordinates. 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 2008 program year, roughly 400 well owners or users participated in the program from 23 different counties around the state of Montana.

Impact Statement:

Through the program, well owners will be educated about water quality test results and well maintenance through interpretive materials distributed to each program 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 quality results throughout Montana that can be entered into a database and used to map water quality parameters throughout the state. This program utilizes partnerships created with local county extension agents and MSU Extension Water Quality.

Category: Rural Environmental Protection
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