

How to Properly Address Abandoned Wells for the Protection of Public Health & Safety

*Borrego Springs
Watermaster*

A well is considered abandoned when it has not been pumped or used for supplying water for at least one year. Oftentimes, abandoned wells are left unsecured and open at the wellhead.



Example of an uncovered Abandoned well



Example of an Abandoned well with pump still intact

Dangers of Abandoned Wells

Abandoned wells can lead to many safety and environmental hazards such as:

- Physical hazards to humans and wildlife at the well head
- Well collapse and sink hole risks
- Debris and contaminants can enter the well at the ground surface and potentially pollute the underlying groundwater basin
- If toxic chemicals reside in an abandoned well, such as oils, such toxic chemicals can also contaminate the groundwater basin
- If the well is constructed across multiple layers of the aquifer system (think of it as a layered cake), the well screens can provide a pathway for cross-contamination between aquifers. An example would be the movement of high nitrate groundwater in a shallow aquifer impacted by septic systems to the deeper, higher quality groundwater.

Regulations for Abandoned Wells

Abandoned wells in Borrego Springs are regulated by the state of California and San Diego County.

State Regulations:

More Information on State of California regulations on wells can be found here: [California Health & Safety Code](#)

County Regulations:

More Information on County of San Diego regulations on wells can be found here: [Chapter 4 Well Ordinance.pdf](#)

Options for Addressing Abandoned Wells

There are three potential options to address abandoned wells for well owners in the Borrego Springs Subbasin:

1. Properly destroy the abandoned well in accordance with County regulations
2. Collaborate with the Watermaster to convert the abandoned well into a monitoring well.
3. If intending to use the well in the future, file an [Inactive Wells - Intent of Use Declaration Form](#) with DEHQ. Fiscal year 2024-2025 fees: \$806 (until June 30, 2025). This will prevent the well from being defined as abandoned.

Process to Properly Destroy a Well

Landowners are responsible for the proper destruction of abandoned wells on their property.

- Inspection: An inspection by a C-57 licensed driller must first be conducted to assess the well's location, condition, construction, and any potential obstructions.
- Obtain a Permit: Obtain a written permit from the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ). The necessary forms and applications are [here](#). The DEHQ permit will not be issued without a C-57 licensed driller first inspecting and verifying that the well is in good condition.
- Licensed Contractor: Once a thorough inspection is conducted, the well destruction must be performed by the C-57 licensed contractor.
- Filling and Sealing: Proper well destruction typically involves filling and sealing of the well casing. These requirements may vary based on the well location and condition.

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Process for Converting to Monitoring Well

The Borrego Springs Watermaster conducts groundwater monitoring of the Borrego Springs Groundwater Subbasin and is actively looking to expand the monitoring network of wells. If an owner of an abandoned well is interested in volunteering the well for Watermaster monitoring (and thereby avoiding the cost to properly destroy the abandoned well), the following is required*:

Review Watermaster Information. The Borrego Springs Watermaster maintains a webpage [here](#) that describes its Groundwater Monitoring Program and opportunities for private well owners to participate in the program.

Notify Borrego Springs Watermaster. Inform the Borrego Springs Watermaster of your interest to participate in the monitoring program by completing and returning a [Potential Participant Form](#).

Provide Well Information. The following information must be submitted to the Watermaster (if available):

- Well Completion Report and/or Well Driller's Log that describe the well construction information (e.g., depth of well screens)
- Historical water-level and/or water-quality data

Conduct Site Visit. The Watermaster will then conduct a site visit to inspect, assess, and document information such as site access, well condition, and current well use.

Obtain Permits:

- **Monitoring Well Permit through the County of San Diego DEHQ.** Once Watermaster has determined the well is appropriate for monitoring, a monitoring well permit must be obtained from the DEHQ by the landowner. Permit approval is not guaranteed and will be based on compliance with applicable regulations and site-specific conditions. If the request is not approved and the well has been abandoned, it must be properly destroyed in accordance with all applicable requirements (see destruction process on page 1).
- **Entry Permit from the Borrego Springs Watermaster.** The Entry Permit is intended to protect the well owner from liability for damage and injury resulting from Watermaster's entry onto the parcel for the purposes of monitoring. At the request of the well owner, a Data Confidentiality Agreement may also be included.

*The Well Owner will be responsible for all costs to convert the monitoring well.

Additional Resources on Abandoned Wells

- Further details on San Diego County's Requirements for Wells can be found here:
https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/deh/lwqd/Chapter_4_Well_Ordinance.pdf
- Information on the San Diego County's DEHQ Monitoring Well Program Permits:
https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/lwqd/sam_monitoring_well_page.html#ProgramInformation
- Further details on the destruction of water wells can be found in the California State Department of Water Resources Bulletin No. 74-90:
 - <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Wells/Well-Standards/Combined-Well-Standards/Bulletin-74-90-Intro>
 - <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Wells/Well-Standards/Combined-Well-Standards/Water-Destruction>
 - <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Wells/Well-Standards/Combined-Well-Standards/Monitoring-Destruction>



Want to learn more?
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Springs Watermaster Website



Scan to view the
Participant form



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water.ca.gov

