

Amador County Environmental Health Department

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Wildfire and Private Water Wells

Information for Water Well Owners after a Wildfire

As an owner of a private domestic water well that may be damaged by a wildfire, you may have some concerns about fire related impacts to your well and water system. The Amador County Environmental Health Department recommends the well owner perform a visual inspection of their well and water system, including the piping and plumbing that provide water to and throughout your home.

Water Well

If you see any of the following damage, you should contact a licensed well contractor to assess and make repairs.

- Damage to electrical wires and connectors that supply power to your well.
- Damage to the well casing and any above-ground piping used with the well to bring water to your home.
- Damage to well houses and equipment such as chlorinators, water treatment equipment, and electronic controls.
- Damage to pressure tanks which could have been caused by exposure to excessive heat.
- Damage to storage tanks, vents, and overflow pipes.

Water Taste and Odors

You may notice that your water tastes or smells earthy, smoky, or burnt. If so, you may need to thoroughly flush your water lines.

Inside Your Home

To the extent you can, visually check the water-supply system, including plumbing, for any damage, signs of leaks, or changes in operation. You should check to see if your well and plumbing system maintained positive pressure during the fire. This can be done by simply turning on a faucet in the household to see if water flows. You should not hear any air being released from the faucet. The flow of water should be steady and uninterrupted. If you do hear air escaping from the faucet with water intermittently

sputing out when it is turned on, that is an indication that your well and household plumbing had a loss of pressure and may have been damaged.

If You've Had Loss of Water Pressure

If your visual inspection shows that there was a loss of pressure or the water system has been damaged, it is likely that your water may be contaminated with bacteria. Damaged components should be repaired or replaced. Anytime a water system loses pressure, the water should be tested for the presence of bacteria before it is used for drinking or cooking. Anytime the well or water system is repaired, it should be disinfected after a repair is made and then tested to ensure the water is safe for drinking or cooking.

Testing Your Well for Bacteria

When testing drinking water for the presence of coliform bacteria, it is necessary to collect a sample and deliver it to a State-certified laboratory. For a list of certified laboratories in our area, please visit our website at: <http://www.co.amador.ca.us/departments/environmental-health/wells>. You can also search on-line (or look in the phone book) for "Laboratories – Drinking Water Testing." Laboratories generally charge between \$20 and \$40 for a bacteria test. Bacteria samples must be collected in an approved container provided by the laboratory. When collecting a sample, follow the instructions that come with the bottle and return the sample bottle to the laboratory in the recommended time.

Using Your Water While You Wait for Test Results

Until you know your water is bacteria free, its recommended that you use boiled or bottled water for drinking, cooking, making ice, brushing teeth, and hand-washing dishes. Heat the water at least 1 minute at a full rolling boil. You can use your tap water for showering (take care to avoid swallowing water) and flushing toilets. If the water tests positive for the presence of coliform bacteria, you should have the well and water system disinfected. Instructions for disinfecting wells can be found on our website at <http://www.co.amador.ca.us/departments/environmental-health/wells/disinfection-of-wells>.

*Much of the above information came from Minnesota Department of Health:
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells/>*