WELL DRILLERS — GUIDE

Well abandonment: what to ask before sealing

Find the responsible authority and obtain a closure record.

Updated November 10, 2026

Identify the well and the authority

An unused well is a project to assess, not a hole to cover and forget. Locate it from records without entering it or removing unsafe covers. Keep people and animals away from an opening. Ask the local well program which contractor qualifications and closure procedures apply.

EPA recommends a certified well driller for abandonment and closure. Washington Ecology says property owners need to work with licensed drillers to decommission abandoned wells. These are source-specific statements. Check your own jurisdiction before commissioning work.

Ontario example

Ontario says a well must be plugged and sealed if it is neither used nor maintained for future use. Its page also lists other abandonment triggers and exceptions. Do not assume an unused well can remain indefinitely because a replacement was drilled.

The province says proper abandonment must follow the Wells Regulation and that a well record must be sent to the ministry. It recommends a licensed well contractor because of the hazards. Ask the contractor which provisions apply to your well and who submits the record.

Request a complete scope

Give the contractor the old record, known depth, construction details and access constraints. Ask how they will assess unknown conditions and remove equipment. Request the proposed sealing method and materials for approval by the responsible authority where needed.

Do not copy a sealing method from another state or province. Ask how the plan accounts for the actual construction and groundwater conditions. Do not use an abandoned well for rubbish, wastewater or drainage.

Keep proof of completion

Ask for the contractor's licence details, work description, materials record and required filing reference. Keep photographs taken safely by the contractor. Confirm that the agency received the closure record and update the property folder.

A cover, demolition of a pump house or cutting off a pipe is not the same as documented closure. Ask for written confirmation of what was done. If the well is difficult to locate, ask the agency and contractor how to investigate before land work starts.

Sources

- Ontario, Wells on your property. Fetched 2026-11-10.
- Washington Department of Ecology, Wells. Fetched 2026-11-10.
- US EPA, Protect Your Home's Water. Fetched 2026-11-10.

Frequently asked questions

Does this replace local advice?
No. Confirm the work with the responsible agency and a qualified contractor.