

## All's Well That Ends Well

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Somewhere on the landscape of Ontario about one-and-a-half-million old water wells perforate the earth. No one knows quite how many. Often no one knows where, not even the property owner.

These old, unused wells are risky business.

Stories of people and animals falling into wells are cliché, but they do happen. A vermin-proof well cap can do wonders for your water quality, and general peace-of-mind that your well isn't becoming a grave of various animals and insects. Doug Hocking from the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority recalls an incident where a horse fell into the well and had to be rescued by the fire department. Doug remembers, "I also spent one Christmas morning pulling a deer out of a well – it had fallen in head-first and drowned. It had been there a while and it was pretty gross."

"I recall one project with an old wood-lined well," says Shannon Stephens of the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, "The farmer was keen to access our local Healthy Waters Program for a grant to properly seal the well. The well was right next to a livestock yard, and providing a route for bacteria and nitrates to contaminate the groundwater. When the licensed contractor was sealing the well, he discovered that the wooden-liner decayed and the sides were slumping and forming a tunnel, which if left unchecked may have undermined the adjacent driveway."

Ontario Ministry of Environment (MOE) Regulation 903 requires that well owners properly seal all unused wells. Progressive municipalities also require well decommissioning when residents connect to municipal water. This reduces the safety hazard, and removes an easy route that nearby contaminants could take to reach the groundwater. Given that the nearest well to that unused-well is often your own, the water you protect might just be the water you drink every day.

Properly sealing a well to provincial standards is not a do-it-yourself Saturday morning project. Not only can it be a technically difficult project that needs specialized training, equipment and



*All sorts of things can end up in unused wells! Protect water from contamination by bacteria, nitrates, and animals by sealing them properly. (Thanks to the Perth East Fire department, the horse lived.)*

materials; but it can also be dangerous due to enclosed spaces. You can expect it to cost between \$800 to \$2,000 depending on the project's complexity and the contractor. Since it is protecting people's drinking water, it's a job you'll want done well (obvious pun intended). Finding a licensed well contractor is easy. The MOE lists licensed contractors by region at [www.waterwellontario.ca](http://www.waterwellontario.ca).

The MOE has kept records of wells since the 1960s; recording new, upgraded and decommissioned wells. If you are buying a new property, or curious about your own – you can order well records for FREE by calling 1-888-396-9355.

If you have an unused well that needs to be sealed, it is worth contacting a couple of agencies before you begin. The project may be eligible for grants and information programs. There's no guarantee because these programs are often location specific and dependant on funding. Start by contacting:

- Your local Conservation Authority (visit [www.conservation-ontario.on.ca](http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca) to find yours)
- Well Aware Program (705-745-7479; [www.wellaware.ca](http://www.wellaware.ca))
- Ontario Groundwater Association (519-245-7194)

After a long full, productive life – the last days of a well ends with a decent decommissioning.

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*“Conservation Corner” is a monthly column that looks at the theory, practices, technology and benefits of land & water stewardship. The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority is your public agency dedicated to the preservation of a healthy environment. As your partner, the NVCA provides the expertise to help protect our water, our land and our future. For comments or suggestions please contact the NVCA at (705) 424-1479, e-mail us at [admin@nvca.on.ca](mailto:admin@nvca.on.ca) or visit our website at [www.nvca.on.ca](http://www.nvca.on.ca).*