

Wake County's Strategic Plan for the Contaminated Groundwater Initiative

Domestic wells play a vital role in providing water to approximately 100,000 Wake County residents for their daily needs. Not only is the domestic well owner responsible for localized source water protection, but through education, all residents can recognize potential pathways for groundwater contamination, learn about testing for contaminants, and better understand analytical results whether provided for their individual well water or by their water provider. By increasing awareness of the use, testing, and maintenance of domestic wells, source water protection goals can be accomplished on a seemingly small, but ultimately much wider scale.

In 2012, Wake County staff researched approaches to address contaminated groundwater and wells. Research included surveying local governments across North Carolina and the nation, reviewing available literature, and interviewing experts within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and other organizations. A solution was drafted, refined, and tailored to the County's land use policies, constituency, and budget. Staff crafted and presented a proposal to the County Commissioners for an ongoing outreach program targeting private well owners, who bear primary responsibility for protecting, managing, and if necessary treating their groundwater source for their household drinking water supply.

The County has since hired a hydrogeologist, developed and used broad outreach materials, begun investigations around known contamination sites, collaborated with external and internal partners, given presentations, and strengthened existing procedures. In fact, so many opportunities have been identified, that a strategic plan was developed, and 31 specific tasks were ranked to clearly communicate and evaluate priorities and needs. The scope of the Strategic Plan for the Contaminated Groundwater Initiative includes consideration of water quality and water quantity concerns to be addressed through community engagement, planning, coordination, education, and research.

The plan acknowledges that the most efficient way to address a problem is through prevention. In all outreach activities, prevention of groundwater contamination is stressed by making the connection that chemical handling practices and septic system maintenance are important to preserving well water quality. Routine testing is encouraged and may help identify a problem in its early stages. The plan addresses technical support for well owners when faced with well water contamination and/or water quantity limitations. Perhaps most importantly, the strategic plan is intended to be a working document that provides a basis for common understanding but is revised as priorities and opportunities change. The tasks identified and detailed in the strategic plan also serve as a ruler to quantify accomplishments for the program.

Accompanying this project description and the completed nomination form are the following:

- The Table of Contents of the Strategic Plan for the Contaminated Groundwater Initiative
- A flyer that was developed and used for broad outreach to well water consumers
- A poster that provides the NC Department of Public Health's recommended testing schedule
- Both sides of a doorhanger that was developed to be used for door-to-door outreach near known contamination sites and will continue to be used for targeted education at known contaminated sites