

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**WELL DECOMMISSIONING**

(no.)  
CODE 351

**DEFINITION**

The sealing and permanent closure of a water well no longer in use.

**PURPOSE**

Prevent entry of animals, debris, or other foreign substances into well or well bore hole;

Eliminate the physical hazard of an open hole to people, animals, and farm machinery;

Prevent entry of contaminated surface water into well and migration of contaminants into unsaturated (vadose) zone or saturated zone;

Prevent commingling of chemically or physically different ground waters between separate water bearing zones;

Eliminate possibility of well being used for any other purpose;

Conserve yield and hydrostatic head of aquifers;

Restore, as far as feasible, hydrogeologic conditions that existed before well was constructed.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to any drilled, dug, driven, bored, or otherwise constructed vertical water well determined to have no further beneficial use.

This practice does not apply to water wells that were used for waste disposal, or if evidence of contamination exists. This practice does not apply to wells that contain contaminant levels that exceed state or federal water quality standards. Treatment of contamination is required before a well is decommissioned.

**CRITERIA**

**Laws and Regulations.** This practice must conform to all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Laws and regulations of particular concern include those involving water rights,

land use, pollution control, property easements, wetlands, preservation of cultural resources, and endangered species.

South Dakota (SD) state law and regulations contain specific requirements for plugging wells and test holes that must be followed.

**General.** Except as described by SD law or regulations, decommissioning must follow procedures in ASTM D5299, Standard Guide for Decommissioning of Ground Water Wells, Vadose Zone Monitoring Devices, Boreholes, and Other Devices for Environmental Activities.

Except as described by SD law or regulations, disinfection shall conform to procedures in Ground Water and Wells (Driscoll, 1986, pp. 620-623).

**Data collection.** As-built construction documents, maintenance records and other available data for the abandoned water well shall be collected, reviewed and applied toward the development of a well decommissioning plan. Existing conditions shall be documented as defined in Plans and Specifications.

**Well preparation.** The well shall be cleared of all pumping equipment, valves, pipelines, casings, liners, screens, grease, oil, scum, debris, and other foreign material as explained in ASTM D5299, part 7.3.8.

**Disinfection.** Before sealing, the entire column of well water shall be brought to an available chlorine concentration of 50 ppm or greater, except as specified by SD law or regulation. After being agitated in the well water, the chemical solution shall be left for no less than 24 hours to assure complete disinfection.

**Sealing materials.** Except as specified by South Dakota law and regulation, properties of sealing materials shall conform to characteristics listed in ASTM D5299, Part 6.3. Acceptable sealing materials are provided in ASTM D5299, Part 6.4. Sealing materials do not require disinfection.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. The current version of this standard is posted on our eFOTG web site available at [www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov) or may be obtained at your local Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Water to be mixed with grout shall be compatible with the grouting material, and shall be of a quality that conforms to criteria provided in ASTM D5299, Part 7.3.3.

**Fill material.** Fill material shall be clean and free of organic or other foreign matter. The gradation shall be such that bridging will not occur during placement.

**Placement of material.** Fill material shall be placed into the well only after the well water has been disinfected. Fill material is placed at a minimum thickness of one foot starting at the top of the lowest water bearing zone and successively placed at intervals every 10 feet or less throughout the entire well column. All material shall be placed from the bottom of the well upward by methods that avoid segregation, dilution, or bridging of the material.

For wells greater than 30 inches in diameter, backfill shall be placed and compacted in a manner that minimizes segregation and bulking to prevent surface subsidence.

**Removal of well casing.** If possible, the casing shall be completely removed from the well by either pulling or overdrilling (overreaming) as explained in ASTM D5299, Part 7.3.1. Casing that cannot be removed completely shall be ripped, perforated, or cut off at a depth greater than the maximum potential for frost penetration or any other near surface soil fracturing hazard (such as desiccation), or five feet, whichever is greater.

**Casings grouted in place.** Casings to be grouted in place shall employ a pressurized grouting procedure that will completely fill and seal the open space around the casing.

Perforated or ripped casing shall provide sufficient apportioned open area to assure passage of the grout into the space. The casing shall be perforated or ripped throughout the entire length of a confining layer.

Casings to be removed from a collapsing formation shall be grouted concurrently with removal such that the bottom of the casing remains submerged in the grout.

**Surface seal.** The interval between the ground surface and the top of cut off casing shall be sealed with sealing materials that conform to ASTM D5299, Part 6.3. These materials may be an extension of the sealing materials used below this depth.

The interval between the ground surface and the top of the cut off casing shall be filled with soil material that achieves an in-place hydraulic conductivity equivalent to or less than the surface soil surrounding the well. The ground surface at the sealed well site shall be mounded and graded in a manner that prevents ponding of surface runoff.

**Control of elevated formation pressure.** If a well penetrates a formation that is under artesian head (confined conditions), or from which a gas is being released under pressure, the grout pressure must be maintained greater than the formation pressure until initial grout set occurs. Procedures for balancing formation pressures during grouting operations shall conform to ASTM D5299, Part 7.3.7.

## CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be part of a ground water protection system that includes water and chemical management practices.

To the extent practicable, an abandoned well should be decommissioned in a manner that restores the original hydrogeologic conditions of the well site and does not preclude the use of the site from future land management practices.

All decommissioning procedures and fill and sealing materials need to be selected with due consideration of the site-specific geological, biological, physical, and climatic conditions, the chemical composition of the surrounding soil, rock and ground water at the well site, and the well's construction practices.

## PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for this practice shall meet this standard and include the requirements needed to achieve its purposes. A record of the installation of this practice shall be made and shall include the following information:

GPS location of the decommissioned well and township/range with enough precision that that the site be located in the field;

Date of completion of well decommissioning;

Name and address of landowner;

Name, title, and address of person responsible for well decommissioning;

Total depth of well;

Length of casing;

Length of casing removed or length of casing cut off below ground level;

Inside diameter of well bore or casing;

Type of casing material or schedule (e.g., standard weight steel, or PVC sch-80);

Static water level measured from ground surface prior to decommissioning;

Types of materials used for filling and sealing, quantities used, depth intervals for emplacement of each type, and emplacement method used.

Any additional information required by the State of South Dakota

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

The site shall be inspected periodically to ensure that the decommissioned well and adjacent area have not settled or eroded, or are otherwise adversely disturbed. The well site and adjacent ground surfaces shall be maintained in a manner that prevents ponding of surface runoff on the site.