CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
WATER RESOURCES

CALIFORNIA WELL STANDARDS UPDATE

PROJECT BRIEF

UPDATED CALIFORNIA WELL STANDARDS

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is updating Bulletin 74, *California Well Standards*, which were last updated in 1991. DWR aims to bring these standards up to date so they are protective of groundwater for four types of wells: water wells, monitoring wells, cathodic protection wells, and geothermal heat exchange wells.

Wells that are not properly constructed can serve as preferential pathways for contaminants to move, untreated, into groundwater, as shown in Figure 1. Potential contaminant pathways in Figure 1 are not addressed by the well standards described in Bulletins 74-81 or 74-90.

Figure 1: Examples of how well construction can influence contamination pathways

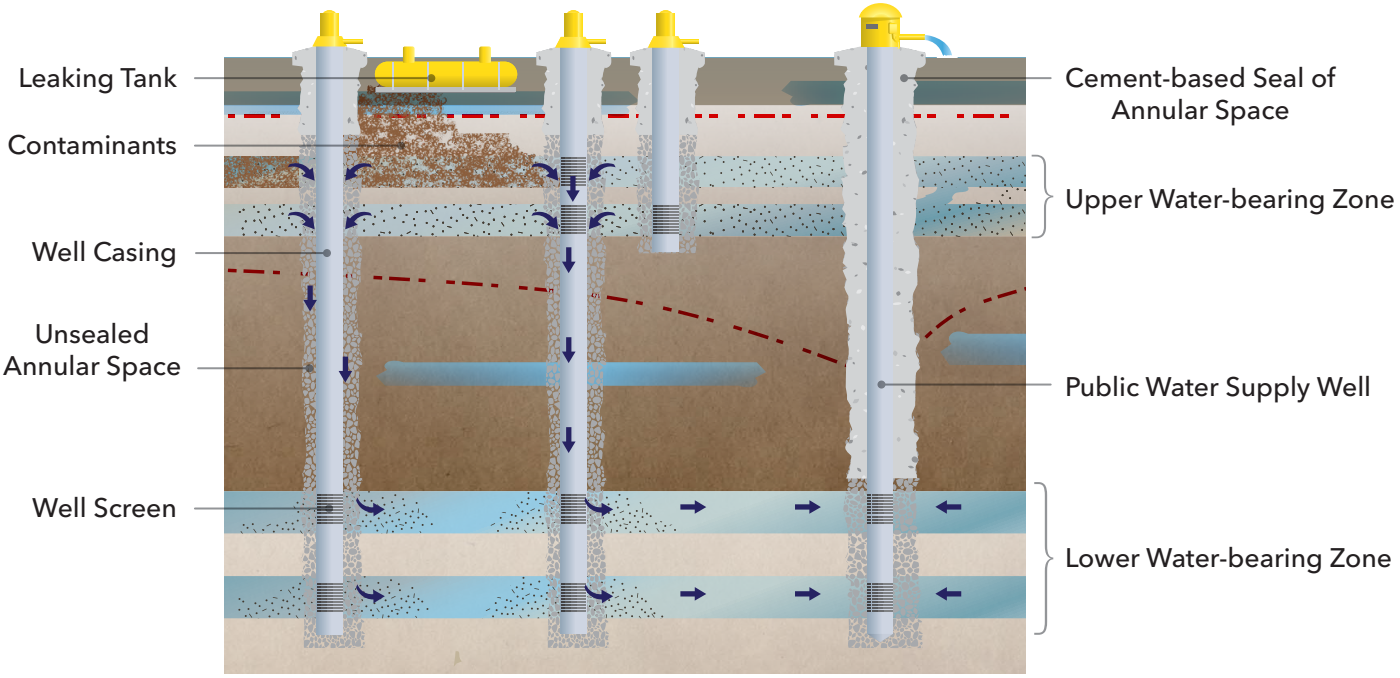


Figure 1 illustrates how wells that lack impervious sealing material in the "annular space"—the space between the well casing and the borehole wall—provide pathways for contaminant movement from the surface and between water-bearing zones. As the arrows show, contaminants move from the leaking underground tank down through the soil into the upper water-bearing zone. The two wells on the left are not sealed and provide a preferential pathway for contaminants to move, untreated, down into the lower water-bearing zone. The pumping supply well on the far right is sealed properly but is vulnerable to contamination due to the poorly constructed wells to its left.

With the updated *California Well Standards*, DWR seeks to strengthen standards for well construction and destruction to prevent wells from acting as conduits for contaminant movement.

WELL STANDARDS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Well standards are administered and enforced at the local level. Local jurisdictions—counties, cities or water districts—have authority to adopt standards that meet or exceed Bulletin 74-81 in their local well ordinances. A county health department or other local enforcing agency is tasked with administering and enforcing the well ordinance, including issuing permits and inspecting well installations.

OUR VISION

Updated Well Standards that are enforceable, protective, and based on the current state of knowledge and best practices.

PROJECT PHASES

PROJECT INITIATION: During project initiation, DWR formed its project team, solicited comments, and drafted content based on technical reviews. DWR publicly kicked off the update and designed the Technical Advisory Committee process.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is a group of about 80 members representing a wide range of constituents with technical expertise in well construction and destruction from across California. The TAC provided feedback to DWR on draft content through facilitated discussions and written comments for consideration by DWR's technical team.

TECHNICAL WRITING AND REVIEW: DWR's technical team of engineers and geologists considered input received from the TAC and other interested parties, conducted desktop research, and consulted with internal and external subject matter experts, including at our partner State and local agencies in developing this update.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS AND FINALIZATION: DWR will release a public review draft of the updated well standards for public comment from November 2026 to January 2027. During the public review process, DWR will accept written comments and hold virtual public workshops to solicit and receive comments verbally. DWR will consider all comments and finalize the updated *California Well Standards*.

TRAINING: DWR is planning on providing training sessions on the updated well standards.

CONTACT US

For more information and to sign up for *California Well Standards* announcements, please visit DWR's Well Standards webpage or email Bulletin74@water.ca.gov.

Figure 2: Interchange of water between water-bearing zones via unsealed annular space by gravity or hydrostatic pressure

