



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

INCREASING WELL WATER TESTING

Rock County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Nitrate in water is a major issue in Rock County, with about one in three well water samples containing unsafe nitrate levels. Even with this high level of risk, it is a challenge to encourage well owners to get their wells tested; many well owners either don't realize well testing is their responsibility or think their water is safe to drink if it looks and smells normal. Rock County Health Department (RCHD) staff estimated less than 5% of all well owners in the county test their well for nitrate each year.

WHAT ROCK COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

RCHD received funding and technical assistance from the Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program to educate well owners and increase well testing. Before the grant began, RCHD staff sent a mailing each year to well owners reminding them to test their well.

With the grant, they opted for a new town-based approach and presented to all town officials at the Rock County Towns Association meeting. Towns volunteered for special testing and RCHD conducted three onsite town hall meetings, creating a comprehensive nitrate testing process for citizens. At the first meeting, RCHD distributed sample bottles, at the second meeting they collected samples, and at the third meeting they reported results and presented on the health effects of nitrate and the importance of continued testing.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

The support of town officials led to several successful presentations. The time in front of RCHD's target audience was invaluable for answering questions, addressing fears and concerns, and moving people to action. The town-based sampling approach paid off: Rock County saw a 300% increase in nitrate testing; 20% of all well owners tested their wells for nitrate during the outreach effort. RCHD staff plan to use this more targeted approach again in the future.



We would not have sampled our well without the special sampling program.

ROCK COUNTY
WELL OWNER

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

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