



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

REDUCING BARRIERS TO WELL TESTING

Marquette County, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Of Marquette County's 15,000 residents, 97% rely on private well water. According to their [2017 County Environmental Health Profile](#), the county's average nitrate level in private wells was twice as high as the overall state rate. Marquette County Health Department staff identified the \$62 testing cost as a barrier for residents. Another barrier is transportation: residents must transport samples to the nearest water quality lab, which is over an hour away. The postal service was unable to transport samples reliably to the nearest lab within the short time frame required by the tests, creating confusion and frustration among residents. Widespread flooding during the year also increased the urgency for well testing.

WHAT MARQUETTE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

Health department staff offered free testing for up to 150 households and prioritized tests for low-income residents via the agency's WIC clinic and community events. Staff also established their office as a UPS Smart Pick Up site so residents could drop off tests in a convenient location, and staff could ensure a timely shipment to the lab. Staff mapped the results of the project and presented them to the Towns Association—a group of elected officials from towns within the county.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

In total, 113 wells were tested for bacteria and nitrate. Four in 10 households had never tested their well previously. The increased testing effort led to a new relationship with the County Land and Conservation office. Because of this project, the health department and County Land and Conservation are collaborating to ensure they have at least one nitrate test result for every square mile of the county. Additionally, staff shared these data with seven fellow counties within their Central Sands Consortium. The consortium is aggregating well testing data, crafting water quality solutions, and working together to drive policy change.

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM
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