

Free testing for Wharton County private water well owners after Hurricane Harvey

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WHARTON — Wharton County area residents who want to have their well water tested should pick up a free water sampling test kit from their local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office, said Corrie Bowen, Ag Extension Agent of Wharton County.

Wharton County area residents have an opportunity to have their well water tested to see if it has been contaminated by flooding from Hurricane Harvey. “Many wells tested need to be retested. Approximately 50% of wells in Wharton County have been found positive for coliform bacteria and another 20% have been found positive for fecal coliform bacteria. To meet the needs of those people needing to retest or for those who just got their wells repaired and running, we are making the test available for the next five weeks,” Bowen reported.

Private water well owners whose wells flooded from the recent rains should assume their well water is contaminated until tested, according to Dr. Diane Boellstorff, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Water Resource Specialist, College Station. “You should not use water from a flooded well for drinking, cooking, making ice, brushing your teeth or even bathing until you are satisfied it is not contaminated,” Boellstorff said.

Boellstorff, who is in Texas A&M University’s soil and crop sciences department, said floodwater may contain substances from upstream, such as manure, sewage from flooded septic systems or wastewater treatment plants or other contaminants. A septic system near a well also can cause contamination when the soil is flooded.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension of Wharton County is offering free well water testing to private well users who were affected by Hurricane Harvey as a means to improve understanding of a flood’s impact on private wells and to enhance communications on well water quality. Funding is being provided by LCRA and KKHA FM 92.5 Radio.

Wharton County area residents can pick up a free water sampling test kit starting October 13 at the AgriLife Extension office at 315 E. Milam St., Suite 112, in Wharton. Instructions will be included with the kits, and well owners must be able to return samples on one of five drop off days to the office from 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. One important thing to make note of is that well owners must take the water sample on the morning just prior to dropping the water sample off at the Wharton County Extension Office. For more information, please contact the Wharton County Extension Office at 979-532-3310.

Drop off dates are as follows:

Tuesday, October 17, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, October 24, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, October 31, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, November 7, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, November 14, 8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Any homeowner with a private water well in the flood-affected area is eligible. There are a limited number of kits, which will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Only 50 tests per week can be accommodated at this time. Samples will be analyzed for coliform bacteria and fecal coliform bacteria. Water quality results will be confidential and will be emailed or mailed to residents' homes.

Instructions for decontaminating a well are available through the following publications free for download at <http://twon.tamu.edu/fact-sheets/>: Decontaminating Flooded Water Wells and Shock Chlorination of Wells.

Drew Gholson, AgriLife Extension program specialist and network coordinator, College Station, said wells should be inspected for physical damage and signs of leakage after a flood.

"If it appears damaged, consult a licensed water well contractor to determine whether repairs are needed," Gholson said.

He also noted flooding can damage the well pump and electrical systems.

"If the pump and/or electrical system has been underwater and it is not designed to be under water, do not turn on the pump as there is a potential for electrical shock or damage to your well or pump," he said.

Gholson said once floodwaters have receded and the pump and electrical system have dried, have a qualified electrician, well driller or pump installer check the wiring system and other well components.

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