

# The NEBLINE

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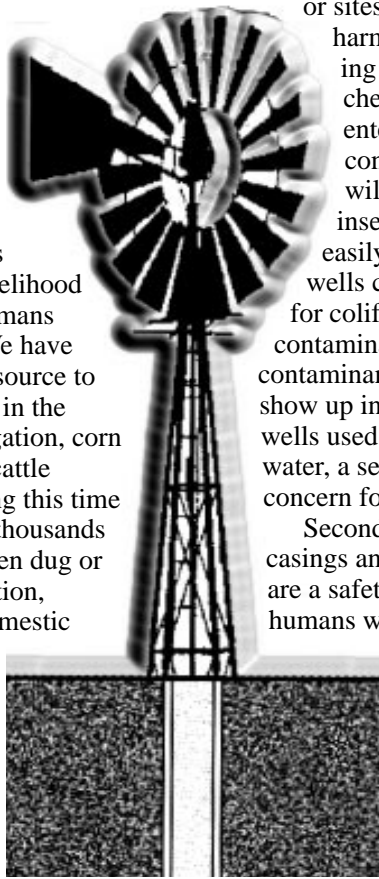
## Plugging abandoned wells can save lives and groundwater

Dave Varner  
Extension Educator

One hundred years ago windmills were a welcome sign to pioneers and livestock traveling on the prairie. Windmills were a precious sign of fresh water for nutrition, cooking and sometimes bathing.

Today, windmills still remind us of the precious water resources that lies beneath them. This water resource is critical to the livelihood and health of humans and livestock. We have also used this resource to become a leader in the center pivot irrigation, corn production and cattle industries. During this time period, literally thousands of wells have been dug or drilled for irrigation, livestock and domestic purposes.

The dilemma we have now is that over this period of time relatively few of these wells



were properly abandoned when their usefulness was exhausted. These abandoned wells are a direct pipeline to our groundwater supply and make it very prone to contamination.

Abandoned wells pose three primary threats. First, they are often located near gardens, fields or sites where the risk of harmful contaminating sediment, chemicals or wastes entering the well is a concern. Rodents, wildlife, pests and insects can all very easily fall into these wells causing potential for coliform bacteria contamination. These contaminants can eventually show up in public or private wells used for drinking water, a serious health concern for humans.

Second, large well casings and hand-dug wells are a safety hazard for humans who may accidentally step or fall into them. For example, take "Baby Jessica" who had this fate in Texas 4 years ago.

Third, open,

abandoned wells are a safety hazard to animals where they have the potential to become crippled or more seriously injured by stepping into an abandoned well.

Properly plugging abandoned wells takes some time and costs money. However, it is time and money well spent when you consider the benefits that include protecting the quality of our groundwater supply and possibly saving a child's life. Plugging an abandoned well will benefit you now, but will also be appreciated by future generations. Remember, abandoned wells are an accident waiting to happen.

An abandoned well demonstration is scheduled Tuesday, June 4, 6:30 p.m. at the University of Nebraska Roger's Memorial Research Farm, 18500 East Adams Street. This demonstration will show participants how to properly plug an abandoned well. Information on cost-share assistance from the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District will also be available.

This demonstration is sponsored by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Nebraska Well Drillers Association and Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

Contact the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County to obtain NebFact sheet NF 92-81 *Plugging*

*Abandoned Wells*. Call the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District for cost-share programs and details.



Wells like this are the target of the Abandoned Well Plugging Program.

### PRIORITY PROGRAM INDEX

The mission of the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County is to help people address issues and needs related to their economic, social and environmental well-being through educational programs based upon scientific knowledge.

Look in this box each month to spot articles addressing Extension priority initiatives. Specific program areas are highlighted with a corresponding icon.



#### Agricultural Competitiveness and Profitability

"Be prepared for drought"—page 3



#### Natural Resources and Environmental Management

"Yard and Garden Waste Management"—page 4



#### Youth and Family Initiative

"Ten alternatives to lashing out at your child"—page 7



#### Nutrition, Food Safety and Quality

"Youth learn about Five-A-Day Program"—page 6



#### Strengthening Neighborhoods and Communities

"Take your exercise program to work"—page 10

## 1996 Pesticide Container Recycling Program begins in June

Last year our Pesticide Container Recycling Program collected over 10,000 containers. Can these numbers possibly be beat? Only with *your* help!

Lancaster County area crop producers/pesticide users can bring their rinsed pesticide containers most Fridays to an area agricultural chemical dealer. You can also bring your clean containers to the Lancaster County Extension Office, 444 Cherrycreek Road between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. Be sure to call ahead (441-7180) to make sure someone will be available to inspect your containers.

At each collection site, pesticide containers will be inspected by a trained individual to make sure they have been triple- or pressure-rinsed. Only white and yellow, 1- and 2 1/2-gallon pesticide containers will be accepted. Brown yard and garden pesticide containers cannot be recycled with the white and yellow containers. Oil bottles and antifreeze jugs are also unacceptable.

### Prepare Containers Properly!

Containers should be *triple- or pressure-rinsed* so no visible residues remain inside the container. Rinse the threads around the container's opening and any product that may have run down the outside. *Drain the containers*; no water should remain inside the container. Some pesticides will stain or discolor containers. These will be accepted if no residues are detected when a container is rubbed with a neoprene glove. *Remove lids and plastic wrap labels*; they cannot be recycled.

Be sure to prepare the containers properly. Containers that have pesticide residues that can be rubbed off will not be accepted and will remain the property of the person bringing the containers to the site. (BPO/DV)

**Turn to Page 11 for a complete list of collection sites and dates.**



Lancaster County 4-H Council  
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