

Frequently Asked

FAQ

Questions

What every well owner should know

Groundwater

Where does groundwater come from?

You can find groundwater in geological formations called aquifers. Water seeps through the surface of the earth, in much the same way that water saturates a sponge, to fill the cracks and pores of sand and gravel layers - right beneath our feet! These aquifers are often called the "groundwater basin."

The Santa Clara Valley Water District uses its network of reservoirs, creeks and specialized ponds to maximize the amount of local rainwater and water "imported" from the Sierra Nevada mountains through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta that replenishes the groundwater basin. This "managed" recharge actually exceeds natural recharge.

Who uses it?

Most water retailers use groundwater from wells and water from drinking water treatment plants to meet customer demand.

Nearly all water used in South County is groundwater. About half is pumped by farmers through agricultural wells and the other half is used by residents and businesses of Morgan Hill and Gilroy and those living in unincorporated rural areas.

Is there enough?

Until the early 20th century, natural groundwater met 100 percent of the local need.

As population and farming increased, more water was pumped. The water district was formed to manage the groundwater supply. In the 1930's, the water district built dams and reservoirs to capture rainwater and replenish the aquifer. These actions secured enough groundwater to sustain the Valley of Heart's Delight and help remedy "subsidence," the sinking of the valley floor due to groundwater over-pumping.

But, by mid-century, with the large population growth and transition to Silicon Valley underway, even natural and locally augmented groundwater recharge could not keep up.

The water district arranged to import water from the Sierra, through the Delta. It built drinking water treatment plants to provide both immediate delivery of imported water to customers and an additional source to replenish the groundwater basin for future use. By making treated imported water available to meet customer demands, the water district protects the groundwater basin from being over-pumped.

What about the future?

Many factors will affect future water supplies including:

- Climate change
- Protecting endangered species in the Delta
- Rebuilding and replacing aging infrastructure
- Public commitment to conservation
- Improved technology for water recycling and desalination

Safe drinking water

Should I have my well tested? How often?

Yes. Private well owners should ensure their well water is safe to drink. Since every property has its own unique features and conditions, the water district recommends annual testing. You may remember receiving this reminder from the water district this year:

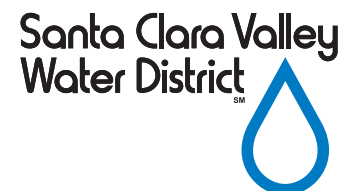
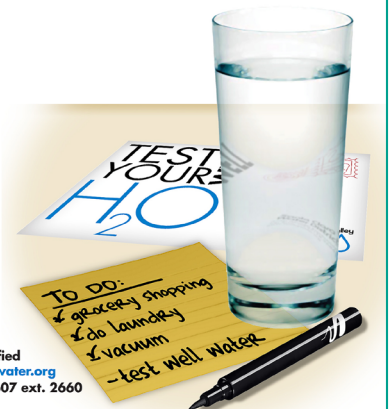
A public service reminder from the Santa Clara Valley Water District

The thousands of wells that draw water from the county's groundwater basins generally produce high quality drinking water. The water district's hundreds of monitoring wells provide data about regional groundwater quality; however every property and well has unique features and conditions. The water district recommends that individual well owners test their well water annually. Changes in color, odor, or taste should also prompt well testing.

Five tips to protect the quality of your well water

1. Be proactive about testing your well water
2. Keep chemicals away from your well
3. Use pesticides or fertilizer appropriately
4. Properly maintain your septic system
5. Protect and maintain your well

For more information, including a list of certified water testing laboratories, visit www.valleywater.org or call the Well Services Hotline (408) 265-2607 ext. 2660



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Test your well if:

- There is a change in color, taste or odor
- There are known problems with wells in your area
- You have experienced problems near your well i.e., flooding, land disturbances
- You replace or repair any part of your well system

What does the water district do to protect groundwater from contamination?

The water district samples monitoring wells for naturally occurring elements, such as arsenic and iron, as well as man-made contaminants like MTBE. We also oversee the proper construction and destruction of wells. Improperly constructed, maintained or destroyed wells can act as conduits to move contaminants into drinking water aquifers. Additionally, we guide local land use agencies and regulatory agencies with oversight on clean up cases.

What can I do?

Prevent runoff from pesticides and herbicides from seeping into the groundwater. Avoid spilling chemicals such as motor oil, antifreeze or fertilizers on the ground. Reduce the possibility of nitrate in groundwater by having your septic tank cleaned and serviced every two years. Request a copy of *A Guide for the Private Well Owner* from the water district.

Well regulations

Who oversees well drilling?

The Santa Clara Valley Water District is responsible for issuing permits and inspecting all well construction and destruction activities in Santa Clara County to ensure groundwater supply is protected for the community. Specifically:

No person shall dig, bore, drill, deepen, refurbish, or destroy a water well, cathodic protection well, observation well, monitoring well, exploratory boring (45 feet or deeper), or other deep excavation that intersects the groundwater aquifers of Santa Clara County without first obtaining a permit from the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

Contact us

If you have questions or concerns contact
Customer Relations (408) 265-2607,
ext. 2000.

What do groundwater production charges pay for?

Benefits

- Reliable, healthy and clean drinking water
- Diverse water supply sources
- Protected and sustained water resources
- Maximized water conservation and recycling

Replenish the groundwater basin

- Operate and maintain local reservoirs to capture water and fill recharge ponds.
- Purchase imported water.

Ensure safe drinking water

- Monitor and protect groundwater from pollutants.
- Ensure proper construction and destruction of wells.

Construct, maintain and repair

- Plan and construct improvements to infrastructure such as dams, pipelines, ponds, treatment plants and pump stations.
- Operate and maintain pipelines and pumping plants to help sustain the groundwater aquifer.

Why does the Santa Clara Valley Water District collect this charge?

State law authorizes the water district to charge users for the costs of its programs and services which protect and augment groundwater supplies. Well owners must file a water production statement whether or not the well has produced water. Failure to file a water production statement and make payment by the due date will result in an administrative charge in addition to any applicable penalties and interest. A recent court decision regarding groundwater charges does not impact your current statement or the amount you owe.

How are these charges set and by who?

Each spring, the water district staff makes a recommendation based on short and long-term analysis of financial conditions and water availability and use projections. All well owners receive notice of the proposed charge and an explanation of the charge-setting process. The board of directors seeks input from advisory committees and retail water providers and holds public hearings in the county's northern and southern parts, rendering a final decision after considering all input.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District manages water resources and provides stewardship for the county's five watersheds, including 10 reservoirs, hundreds of miles of streams and groundwater basins. The water district also provides flood protection throughout Santa Clara County. Visit our website, www.valleywater.org.