CLEAN WATER ACTION
MARYLAND

HB1069: Water Supply - Private Well Safety Program

House Environment and Transportation Committee
February 24, 2021

Positon: Favorable

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Maryland's drinking water supply is divided in two bins: public water and well water. When a home is connected to the public water supply, they are assured that the water is regularly tested and treated for common contaminants. Over the years, the public water supply has had a lot of attention, which is important. But many Marylanders are on private wells, which do not have the same oversight that the public water system has.

Clean Water Action has engaged on septic policy for several years, and where there are septic systems there are typically wells. Like septic systems, well health is the responsibility of the homeowner - they are responsible to test and remediate their water. Unfortunately, many residents on wells do not realize that they are responsible for their own water quality. Under current state law, tests only occur when the well is drilled, when the home is sold, or when certain qualifying events happen (like adopting or fostering a child).

Aside from the initial well test, subsequent tests are not reported to the state, which is a waste of what could be important information. If one homeowner's well fails drinking water standards, then it would be a good idea to notify surrounding homeowners so they could also test their systems. If the state maintained a database for tests to be reported to, this notification could happen and the state could better track problem areas for more serious intervention.

While groundwater can flow significant distances, it is oftentimes impacted by surrounding land uses, and well water contamination may point to a problem that can be fixed. For example, a nearby failing septic system can release harmful microorganisms and nitrates into the groundwater, impacing nearby wells. Many different land uses can impact well water quality and the health of the family drinking from it, including agriculture, industry, fuel storage, and road salt.

As the USGS Ground Water and the Rural Homeowner points out, a single well test at point of sale is not sufficient to assure a homeowner that their groundwater is free of bacteria. A

one time chlorination may temporarily destroy the bacteria in the well, but if the contamination is in the aquifer then the problem is not solved.[1]

Salt in Maryland's wells is a growing concern, whether it be from water softeners or, more likely, road salt. While residents on public water are able to access water quality reports, residents on wells are required to test for themselves. In 2019, the University of Maryland Extension highlighted this problem.

> A Maryland Geological Survey study found that the average sodium level in homes using well water on Maryland's coastal plain (the region of Maryland east of I-95), was 92.6 mg/liter. According to Lazur's research, this means that if you follow a low-sodium diet and drink the recommended amount of water per day, you would consume 15 percent of your total daily sodium intake just through your drinking water.[2]

The health of Maryland's wells, and how they impact the health of our rural residents, needs more attention, education, and oversight. A well surveillance program and notification is critical to provide more Marylanders with the information and resources to test their water quality, identify hotspots and other problem areas, and remediate the problem.

We appreciate Delegate Stewart bringing forward HB1069 to delve into this important issue and urge a favorable report.

Thank you,

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[1] USGS. Ground Water and the Rural Homeowner. https://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/gw_ruralhomeowner/
[2] Wormuth, Laura. "Sodium in Well Water: A Maryland Health Concern." 2019, September 4. https://extension.umd.edu/news/sodium-well-water-maryland-health-concern