



Frequently Asked Questions about Underground Injection Control Program

From Ecology's Water Quality Program, Watershed Management Section

Q: What is an Underground Injection Control (UIC) well?

A: A UIC well is a human-made hole that is used to put water or other fluids into the ground. In Washington State, most of these wells are used to dispose of wastewater (*e.g.*, septic drain fields) and stormwater runoff (*e.g.*, drywell or trench holding a perforated pipe).

Q: Where did the UIC Program come from?

A: Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974 and required the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create the UIC Program as one of the key programs for protecting drinking water sources. In 1984, Ecology received the authority from EPA to regulate UIC wells and adopted the UIC rule, Chapter 173-218 WAC.

Q: Why are UIC wells regulated?

A: Fluids going into a UIC well could reach the subsurface and travel to ground water (water located under the ground surface). Contamination of ground water could result if a UIC well is not properly sited, constructed, operated, and maintained. Injection into the subsurface is one of the primary means of disposing of fluid wastes in the United States, with more than 400,000 injection wells disposing of millions of gallons of fluids.

Q: What are EPA's requirements for the UIC program?

A: EPA has defined two requirements:

- UIC wells must be registered. In Washington, Ecology has primacy over all UIC wells, except for UIC wells located on tribal lands. If a UIC well is located on tribal land then the owner must register with EPA Region 10. Registration forms can be found at Ecology's UIC website or at EPA Region 10 website.
- The UIC wells must meet the non-endangerment standard, meaning the UIC well must be constructed, operated, maintained, and decommissioned in a manner that protects ground water quality.

Q: What types of UIC wells are used in Washington State?

- **A:** The majority of UIC wells in Washington State are referred to as Class V wells and are used for stormwater management. Other examples include: large on-site septic systems, heat pump return flow wells, aquifer storage and recovery wells, and wells used to clean up ground water. Typical types of Class V wells used in Washington State include:



- An infiltration trench with perforated pipe, used to manage stormwater.
- A drywell used to manage stormwater from roads and parking.
- A septic system used for sanitary waste disposal from an apartment building.

Q: Are some UIC wells prohibited in Washington State?

A: Yes, discharges that contain hazardous substances or that cannot meet the criteria in the Ground Water Quality Standards are prohibited, such as:

- Discharges from a gas station service floor drain that leads to a septic system.
- Discharges from a strip mall containing small businesses (*e.g.*, a photo processor or a dry cleaner) that discharge sanitary wastes, mixed with their process water, into a septic system.

Q: Are any wells used to put fluids in the ground exempt from the UIC Program?

A: Yes, the following structures are exempt from the UIC Program:

- Single-family residential on-site septic systems that only receive human sanitary waste and are designed to serve fewer than 20 people per day.
- Any human-made hole that is not used to put fluids into the ground.
- Infiltration ponds and infiltration trenches that do not contain perforated pipe.
- A UIC well receiving roof runoff from a single family home.

Q: How can I find out more information on the UIC rule revision?

A: For more information please contact:

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Information on this topic can be accessed through Ecology's Web site:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/grndwtr/uic/index.html>