



AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

SIMPLIFYING WELL WATER TEST RESULTS

Florence and Marinette Counties, Wisconsin

THE PROBLEM

Florence and Marinette County health departments distributed 250 test kits to encourage county residents to test their private well water for arsenic. Residents returned 219 (88%) tests to the laboratory. Health department staff reviewed the results and noticed that while the lab reports were straightforward to a public health professional, they were not likely to be as clear for most well owners. In addition, the lab reports didn't provide well owners with action items based on their results. Staff worried the reports could cause confusion and lead to inaction.

WHAT FLORENCE AND MARINETTE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENTS DID

The Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (Tracking) connected health department staff with a groundwater expert in their Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health. This expert described specific action steps a well owner should take based on their arsenic levels. With this information, Tracking staff developed three form letters outlining what a well owner should do based on their well water results; the letters contained different actions for different arsenic thresholds. Health department staff attached the letters to the arsenic lab results before sending them to the well owners.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

With the additional information in these letters, well owners have a better chance of taking action to correct an arsenic problem. The clearer information also makes it more likely well owners will test their water in the future. Florence and Marinette County Health Departments will continue to use the letters moving forward.

Other health agencies interested in improving their communication about well water testing can contact dhstracking@wi.gov to get copies of the letters.



Science can be hard to translate, and it is our role in public health to help residents make informed decisions using accurate, understandable information. A community member who is accurately informed is also a trusted messenger for others.

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WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht | OCTOBER 2016 | dhstracking@wi.gov
Department of Health Services | Division of Public Health | P-01595c (rev. 09/2017)
This project funded by the Tracking team's *Taking Action with Data* program.

