



## AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

# CREATING BASELINE ARSENIC WELL WATER TEST DATA

Burnett County, Wisconsin

### THE PROBLEM

Arsenic poisoning in private wells is a problem in certain parts of Wisconsin. However, some pockets of the state have minimal data on well tests for arsenic, leading to uncertainty about the risk for local residents. On the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) [Well Water Viewer](#)—a sister portal to the [Wisconsin Environmental Public Health Tracking portal](#)—there were only 21 well tests for the past several decades for Burnett County, a county in the rural, northwestern region of the state. Burnett County Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Unit staff were interested in enhancing that dataset to better understand arsenic risk in their county.

### WHAT BURNETT COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DID

With funding from the Tracking Program's *Taking Action with Data* grant, public health staff provided well water and arsenic education at town hall meetings in each of the county's 21 townships. Meeting attendees were given the opportunity to test their well for arsenic for free. Staff distributed 138 test kits and 118 were returned, yielding an impressive 85% return rate.

Public health staff visualized the test results by [mapping them](#). In total, 81% of tests came back with no detectable arsenic. About 19% of tests had results below 10µg/L, which is recognized as a safe level by the Environmental Protection Agency. One well had unsafe levels above 10µg/L. Staff called the owner of that well and gave information about retesting and preventive actions to take in the meantime.

### THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Over a hundred well owners now have data on arsenic levels in their wells. In addition, health department staff have a richer dataset to evaluate arsenic risk in their communities. This project quintupled the number of wells for which information was available and, as such, dramatically improved the baseline data on well water arsenic for Burnett County. These data will be used to help craft future well water testing messaging and outreach strategies. Finally, this project educated community leaders throughout the county on the importance of testing their well water.

EXPLORE YOUR COUNTY'S  
PRIVATE WELL WATER DATA:

**SEARCH "UWSP WELL WATER  
VIEWER" IN YOUR FAVORITE  
SEARCH ENGINE**

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING PROGRAM  
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