

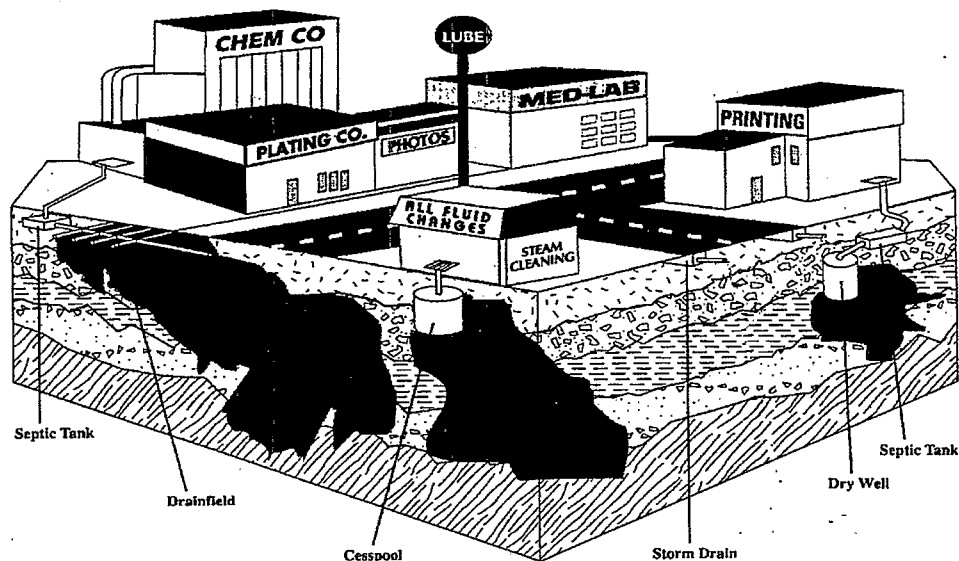


FACT SHEET

CLASS V INJECTION WELLS

**EPA Proposes to Continue with its Existing Approach
for Managing Class V Injection Wells**

April 2001



What is a Class V injection well?

A well is any bored, drilled, or driven shaft, or dug hole that is deeper than wide at its widest surface dimension; an improved sinkhole; or a subsurface fluid distribution system.

Typically, Class V injection wells are shallow "wells," such as septic systems and drywells, used to place nonhazardous fluids directly below the land surface. However, Class V wells can be deep, highly sophisticated wells. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates there are more than 650,000 Class V wells in the United States. Class V wells are located in every state, especially in unsewered areas where the population is likely to depend on groundwater for its drinking water source.

What are Class V injection wells used for?

Class V wells are a convenient and inexpensive means to dispose of a variety of nonhazardous fluids. Some examples of Class V wells are agricultural drainage wells, storm water drainage wells, large capacity septic systems, sewage treatment effluent wells, spent brine return flow wells, mine backfill wells, aquaculture waste disposal wells, solution mining wells, in-situ fossil fuel recovery wells, special drainage wells, experimental wells, aquifer remediation wells, geothermal electric power wells, geothermal direct heat wells, heat pump/air conditioning return flow wells, saltwater intrusion barrier wells, aquifer recharge and aquifer storage and recovery wells, subsidence control wells, and industrial wells. For facilities that generate nonhazardous wastes, Class V wells provide for disposal when there is no access to a sewer system. Class V wells are also an alternative to discharges to surface water.

The effective management of Class V wells is vital because of their large number, the wide variety of fluids discharged into them, and because most accessible fresh water is stored underground in aquifers. Aquifers serve as drinking water sources for 86 percent of public water systems in the United States. These aquifers also supply private drinking water and agricultural wells, feed our lakes, and recharge our streams and rivers, particularly during dry periods.

What federal regulatory requirements apply to Class V injection wells now?

All Class V wells are regulated by Underground Injection Control (UIC) Programs, and states and EPA Regions already have the authority to prevent any Class V well from endangering underground sources of drinking water. Current federal requirements prohibit any injection activity that may endanger underground sources of drinking water (40 CFR Part 144). Also, the current federal regulations require all owners and operators of Class V wells to provide inventory information (location, legal contact, nature of the injection activity, etc.) to their state UIC authority.

In December 1999, EPA published new requirements for large capacity cesspools and motor vehicle waste disposal wells, two types of Class V wells. New and existing large capacity cesspools and new motor vehicle waste disposal wells are banned nationwide. Existing motor vehicle waste disposal wells are banned in groundwater protection areas and other state-designated sensitive groundwater areas. However, owners and operators of existing motor vehicle waste disposal wells may seek waivers from the ban and apply for permits that would allow them to continue operating their wells, provided the waste meets drinking water standards at the point of injection.

What is EPA's notice of proposed determination?

In September 1999, EPA completed *The Class V Underground Injection Control Study*, a comprehensive study of most types of Class V wells. The *Study* consisted of two major components: (1) information collection, which involved a comprehensive literature search, state and EPA regional data collection, requests to the public for data, and peer review; and (2) inventory modeling to estimate the number of storm water drainage wells and large capacity septic systems, two types of wells believed to be widespread but for which adequate inventory information was particularly lacking.

Today's proposed determination addresses all the Class V well types not addressed in the 1999 final rule. EPA proposes that existing federal regulations for Class V wells are adequate to protect drinking water supplies, and that additional federal UIC regulations are not needed at this time to prevent Class V wells from endangering underground sources of drinking water. This proposed determination is based on the Agency's evaluation of the data collected as part of *The Class V Underground Injection Control Study*, information on industrial wells, and other information placed in the public docket for comment.

Nevertheless, this determination does not end EPA's obligations, requirements, and actions to prevent Class V wells from endangering underground sources of drinking water. Class V UIC Program Directors have many obligations and authorities under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) to ensure the protection of USDWs. The Agency will continue to meet these obligations and implement these authorities for all Class V wells.

What is EPA's overall plan for managing the risks posed by Class V injection wells?

EPA's management plan for Class V injection wells includes the following major components:

1. **Implement Existing Class V Regulations** An ongoing effort by state and EPA UIC Programs to implement existing regulations:
 - Identification of Class V facilities
 - Effective and appropriate use of existing regulatory authorities such as permitting, enforcement actions, and wells closure
 - Providing increased technical assistance to bring endangering wells into compliance
 - EPA will continue to develop tools and work cooperatively with states to ensure that well owners and operators remain in compliance
2. **Implement the New Regulations** An intense state and EPA effort to implement the Class V "Phase 1" Rule, promulgated in December of 1999, which addresses motor vehicle waste disposal wells and large capacity cesspools through:
 - Outreach
 - Training
 - Technical Assistance
 - Compliance Assistance

What is EPA's overall plan for managing the risks posed by Class V injection wells? (continues)

3. **Educate Well Operators** An ongoing outreach effort by state and EPA UIC Programs to educate operators regarding their responsibilities under federal and state requirements, and provide information on best management practices.
4. **Exploring Non-regulatory Approaches** A continuous effort by EPA to work closely with targeted industries that may use Class V injection wells, to establish voluntary standards and practices to protect public health.
5. **Preparing for Future Actions** Today's proposed determination does not preclude future action under our UIC authority if the Agency determines that additional regulatory action is needed. In the normal course of program operations, EPA will continue to work with states, industries, and environmental organizations to collect and evaluate data on Class V wells and their risks.

How do I get more information?

For more information, contact the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791 (email: hotline-sdwa@epamail.epa.gov). You can also get well-specific fact sheets and other information on Class V wells, including information on the Class V Rule from the EPA website: <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/uic/classv.html>. For technical questions contact Joan Farrelly at farrelly.joan@epa.gov (email address).

How can I comment on the proposed determination?

EPA will accept public comments on the proposed determination until July 6, 2001. Address written comments to the UIC Class V, W-98-5 Comment Clerk, Water Docket (MC-4101); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20460. Comments may be submitted electronically to ow-docket@epamail.epa.gov.