

wellcare® information for you about

PROPER USE AND DISPOSAL OF PESTICIDES AND FERTILIZERS

Pests such as weeds, insects, molds, and fungi can damage your lawn and garden. Pesticides can help treat certain types of pests but are not always the best or only solution. If pesticides are used, proper use and disposal are necessary to prevent harm to people, pets and plants, and to protect the air, soil, and water from pollution.

Likewise, fertilizers can be beneficial to your lawn and garden. However, many fertilizers contain nitrogen, which can convert to harmful nitrate. Careful use of fertilizers can help reduce the chance that nitrate will leach into your groundwater.

This sheet contains general information and guidance on the proper use and disposal of pesticides and fertilizers. Your state may also have laws related to the use and disposal of pesticides and fertilizers. Check with your state fertilizer and pesticide regulatory agencies or call the National Pesticide Information Center at 1-800-858-7378.

Can Pesticides and Fertilizers get into my well?

Pesticides and fertilizers can reach aquifers through the soil by way of rain or snow recharge. In addition, if pesticides or fertilizers are spilled or misused near a well, they can reach your well water. Some sources say spills within 25-50 feet of wells have a greater risk for contamination; others say pesticides and fertilizers should not be handled or stored within 100 feet of a well.

Several factors determine whether a pesticide or fertilizer will reach groundwater. These include:

- The properties of the pesticide or fertilizer, such as how quickly it breaks down and its solubility in water.
- The properties of the soil. Sandy soil or soil that is low in organic matter has a higher potential for groundwater contamination.
- The conditions of the site, such as its proximity to groundwater aquifers. Wet climates and areas with extensive irrigation also have a higher potential for contamination in groundwater.
- Management practices such as timing of application in relation to pest problems, crop growth, rainfall and irrigation.

For information on the health effects of pesticides, as well as information on testing and treatment, refer to our [wellcare® information sheet on Pesticides](#).

Preventing Contamination in your Well

You can take steps to prevent the potential for pesticide contamination of your well. First, consider whether a pesticide is the best method for treating your pest problem. Alternatives such as baits and traps are safer than pesticides.

Non-chemical pest control methods include hand picking pests from leaves. Prevention techniques include keeping your grass height no shorter than 2.5 inches to discourage pests and shade weeds, and rotating plant position periodically to minimize the spread of disease. Keep in mind that some insects, such as praying mantises and ladybugs, are beneficial to plants, by helping to kill more harmful insects and organisms.

Using, Storing, and Disposing of Pesticides

If pesticides are used, the following precautions should be taken. Many of these tips will also apply to fertilizer use.

Using Pesticides

Do:	DO NOT:
Choose the right type of pesticide for your problem. Insecticides treat insects, herbicides control vegetation, and fungicides control molds and fungi. Ready to use pesticides are preferred to those which require mixing or measuring because they reduce the chance of spills that may occur during mixing.	Aerosols are not a good option because they disperse chemicals, making it difficult to apply them only to the affected area.
Calculate the amount of pesticide needed for your problem. If possible, spot treat. Remember: more is not better. Buying and mixing only the amount needed for the application will prevent you from having to worry about storing or disposing of extra pesticide.	Never spray pesticides in windy conditions.
Read the label carefully. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for applying, storing, and disposing of the product, as well as any precautions such as wearing goggles or gloves.	Never leave a pesticide unattended, and never use pesticides around other people, especially children and pets.
Clean up any spills immediately.	Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling pesticides.

Storing Pesticides

Do store pesticides:	DO NOT store pesticides:
In their original container with labels intact.	In application equipment.
Tightly covered.	In food or beverage containers.
Out of reach of children and pets, preferably in a locked cabinet.	Near food, animal feed, seed, or medical supplies.
According to temperature and humidity specifications given on the label.	Near heat sources or flammable materials.
Along with any tools that were used for mixing or applying pesticides. Mark these tools clearly, so that they are not used for any other purpose.	Where flooding is possible, or where they might spill or leak into wells or drains.

Disposing of Pesticides

Do:	DO NOT:
Follow instructions on the label and use the entire product if possible. Empty containers are safer to clean and dispose of properly.	Rinse the container or pour pesticides down a drain or on the ground.
If the container is made of metal or plastic and completely empty, puncture it to ensure it is not reused. Wrap the container and dispose of it in the trash.	Puncture a pressurized container such as an aerosol can, as puncturing could cause the can to explode.
Bring unwanted pesticides to your local household hazardous waste collection program.	Put pesticides in food or beverage containers or reuse pesticide containers.
To find a site near you, you may visit https://earth911.com , or contact your local solid waste management authority, county agricultural commissioner, or environmental health department.	

Should I test my water for Pesticides and Fertilizers?

If you believe your water may be contaminated with pesticides or a spill has occurred near your well, you should have your water tested by a state certified laboratory. Your county health department, state environmental agency, or state pesticide program can tell you if pesticides have been found in wells in your area, whether you should test your water, and what tests are needed. Contact your state or local health department, the wellcare® Hotline, or use our [interactive map](#) for a list of state-certified laboratories in your area. If you suspect contamination or experience illness, stop drinking or cooking with the water immediately, and do not resume use until testing has proven it to be safe. Always seek the advice of your medical doctor if you have any health concerns. See our wellcare® information sheet on [Nitrate and Nitrite](#) for more information on testing and treatment for nitrate-containing fertilizers.

For More Information on Proper Use and Disposal of Pesticides and Fertilizers

Contact your licensed well contractor, local health department, or the wellcare® Hotline for more information on Pesticides and Fertilizers and your water well.



Information to help maintain and protect your water well system:

wellcare® is a program of the [Water Systems Council \(WSC\)](#). WSC is the only national organization solely focused on protecting the health and water supply of an estimated 23 million households nationwide who depend on private wells (according to the U.S. EPA).

This publication is one of more than 100 wellcare® information sheets available FREE at www.watersystemscouncil.org.

Well owners and others with questions about wells and well water can contact the wellcare® Hotline at 1-888-395-1033 or visit www.wellcarehotline.org to fill out a contact form or chat with us live!

JOIN THE WELLCARE® WELL OWNERS NETWORK!

By joining the FREE wellcare® Well Owners Network, you will receive regular information on how to maintain your well and protect your well water.

Contact us at 1-888-395-1033 or visit www.wellcarehotline.org to join!