

Critical Groundwater Quality Management Act!—take Action

Updating Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act

FINALLY, a Hearing on a critical Groundwater bill! **Please submit testimony by Tuesday.** (Sample testimony below and send a copy by email to your Senator and Representative.)

You have read articles about unchecked groundwater pollution in the Umatilla Basin severely impacting private drinking water wells going on for nearly four decades but beyond monitoring and notices not much has been done! This is a serious health issue throughout the state with well-water contaminants in levels well above safe drinking water standards. The contaminants include nitrates, arsenic, and pesticides.

Similar contamination to Umatilla exists in many areas, including Malheur County, the Willamette Valley, Prineville, LaPine and Jackson County. There are 800,000 people in Oregon who depend on these private wells for their drinking water.

Although a Groundwater Quality Protection Act passed in 1989, it has not been effective, and contamination is getting worse. Why? Because the victims are unseen and without voice. Often low income, often Hispanic, and widely dispersed, most of the people drinking this contaminated water do not even know it, nor do they realize the risk to their health. The polluters (including mega-dairies and Confined Animal Feeding Operations) are represented by some of the most powerful lobbying organizations in the state. The State of Oregon needs to stand up and finally treat this like the serious public health and environmental justice issue it is.

On Tuesday, April 8th at 1:00 p.m. the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Committee will hold a hearing on [Senate Bill 1154](#), a bill to make changes to our groundwater quality laws to provide better drinking water protection.

There are many letters in opposition, so we need to up our game!

Major Talking POINTS:

- **Public Health:** The proposed law is strengthened to be more effective to protect innocent victims' health. We must inform the victims and provide alternative safe drinking water AND put in place methods to reduce the ongoing pollution.
 - The contamination of private drinking water wells with nitrates, arsenic and pesticides well above health-based drinking water standards is common throughout the state. (Umatilla, Prineville, lower Willamette Valley, Malheur and more)
 - Before 2013 various sampling showed:

- Significant groundwater contamination detected in 35 out of 45 regional assessments.
- 17% of 1010 wells sampled for arsenic exceeded the MCL of 10 parts per billion
- 16% of 3199 sampled for nitrate exceeded the MCL of 10 parts per million
- 67% of wells sampled in Malheur County contained the pesticide Dacthal with concentrations up to 32 times the health advisory level
 - Random sampling indicates 33 % of rural drinking water wells in Willamette Valley contain detectable pesticide contamination with up 15 different pesticides detected.
- Nitrates are known to cause methemoglobinemia in infants. This is a condition where the hemoglobin cannot carry enough oxygen. Not a good thing for a baby's brain or developing organs.
- Chronic nitrate exposure increases colorectal cancer, now the 2nd most common cancer in the US, breast cancer, bladder cancer, thyroid disease, and neural tube defects in infants—a truly preventable disease. Colorectal cancer, thyroid disease and neural tube defects are increased even in levels not reaching the nitrate water standard upper limits. (NIH 2018-Review <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6068531/>)
- **Agency Authority:** Support updating the law to create a comprehensive approach for agencies to work in coordination to counteract the issue. The agencies will have to report back to the legislature on their progress to the Oregon Departments of Health, Water Resources, Environmental Quality and Agriculture.
- **Agency Accountability:** Most importantly, the state agencies responsible for addressing this issue need to be held accountable. The proposed changes address this. This will be accomplished by making a designated agency responsible for coming up with a plan to reduce the pollution. The current law does not do this.

How do I write my testimony?

Dear Chair Golden and Committee Members:

My name is [first and last name] and I live in [city or rural county area]. I am writing in support of SB 1154 to update Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act.

I support SB 1154 because (use the following prompts to craft your own message)

- *Share why you care about safe drinking water and protecting our aquifers for water quality.*
- *Share any personal stories – if you or someone you know relies on a well for drinking water and if you know of any issues they have had.*
- *Add talking points like those mentioned above or of your own.*

Thank you for supporting SB 1154.

Sincerely,

Name, City or Area

Testimony can be just a couple sentences to paragraphs or whatever you can provide. Numbers count so we need to add to the letters of support. [Click on this link](#) put in your name, say you support the bill.