

WHEN IS A WELL A PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are more than 148,000 public water systems in the United States. The EPA defines public water systems as those that provide water for human consumption to at least 15 service connections or serves an average of at least 25 people for at least 60 days a year.

EPA Public Drinking Water Classifications

The EPA classifies public water systems according to whether they serve the same people year-round or on an occasional basis. The three types of public water systems, as defined by the EPA include:

- **Community Water System (CWS)** supplies water to the same population year-round.
- **Non-Transient Non-Community Water System (NTNCWS)** regularly supplies water to at least 25 of the same people at least six months per year, but not year-round. Examples include schools, factories, office buildings, and hospitals that have their own water systems.
- **Transient Non-Community Water System (TNCWS)** provides water in places where people do not remain for long periods of time, such as campgrounds or gas stations.

State Definitions

In cases where the state holds the primary authority to enforce regulations for public water systems, the state may define a public water system. Therefore, some state definitions of what constitutes a public water system vary from the EPA's definition. A state's definition must be at least as stringent as the EPA regulations. In other words, the state may require that fewer service connections make up a public water system, but it cannot define a public water system as anything larger than 15 service connections, or an average of 25 people served by the system.

This issue becomes significant to owners of shared wells if a well is classified as a public water system, its owners must follow the EPA's standards for drinking water testing and treatment. Unless the system is defined as a "public water system," it is not subject to EPA regulation.

The table on the following page shows what constitutes a public water system, for those states whose definition differs from the EPA's definition (at least 15 service connections, or an average of at least 25 people, for at least 60 days per year).

State Definitions: When Does a Well Become a Public Water Systems?

State	Definitions
Arizona	The term public water system refers to any water system that has 15 or more service connections (hook-ups) or serves 25 or more people
Delaware	A public water system which serves at least fifteen (15) service connections used by year-round residents or regularly serves at least twenty-five (25) year-round residents
Kansas	At least 10 service connections or regularly serves at least 25 individuals daily at least 60 days out of the year
Maryland	25 or more people a day for more than 60 days per year is a public water system
Michigan	Provides year-round service to not less than 25 residents OR not less than 15 living units
Minnesota	At least 25 persons or 15 service connections year-round
Nevada	15 or more service connections, or regularly serves 25 or more persons
New York	At least 5 service connections or that regularly serves an average of at least 25 people daily for at least 60 days out of the year
Oregon	More than 3 connections, or supplies water to a 10 or more individuals per day for at least 60 days per year
South Carolina	Anything more than one system serving a single household or dwelling
Washington	Any system or water supply intended or used for human consumption or other domestic uses including, but not limited to, source, treatment, storage, transmission and distribution facilities where water is furnished to any community, number of individuals or is made available to the public for human consumption or domestic use. This definition shall exclude any water system serving one single family residence, water systems existing prior to September 21, 1977 which are owner operated and serve less than ten single family residences, and water systems serving no more than one industrial plant

Information in this table is current as of 11/15/2023.

For More Information on When is a Well a Public Water System?

Contact your licensed well contractor, local health department, state environmental agency, or the wellcare® Hotline.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Drinking Water Requirements for States and Public Water Systems. Information about Public Water Systems. <https://www.epa.gov/dwreginfo/information-about-public-water-systems>



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!