New England schools are responsible for providing safe drinking water to their students, staff, and teachers. School facilities must have access to quality public water supply and provide drinking water by operating their own wells or water systems.

Both flooding on the landscape and the well system essentially makes it too risky to rely solely on public water supply. New drinking water programs have designated these lands as drinking water protection areas. Depending on which state you’re located in, this area may be called wellhead protection area, aquifer protection area, drinking water protection area, or some other water protection area. As water moves across the land or through the soil, it may pick up pollutants and carry them into the general water supply used by the school’s wells. For this reason, it is important to keep pollutants off these lands, whenever possible.

1. Investigate Your School’s Drinking Water Protection Area

- Call your state drinking-water program to find out how to contact your school’s drinking water protection area.

2. Plan for Action

- Create a drinking-water action program for your school’s drinking water supply. Make the supply’s protection area a priority and address all pollution from this area and beyond.

- Improve or sustain an emergency response plan. Identify potential threats to your drinking water, appropriate response activities, and emergency response procedures. Post emergency contact information and keep a list of approved contractors.

- Involve all the school staff in creating a plan that includes the responsibilities of all staff during an emergency. Post a list of responsibilities for your school’s drinking water supply. Map the supply’s protection area, and contact your state drinking-water program to get a copy of the Source Water Assessment for your school’s wells.

3. Limit Activities on the Source (wellhead)

- Limit activities around wells. The most critical area in any protection zone is a well or a water supply area, and those that require routine or emergency services easily. Keep all roads around the wellhead closed to the general public.

- Don’t use or store pesticides, fertilizers, hazardous or toxic chemicals, and oil-based materials in the wellhead area.

- Direct storm water runoff from parking areas and streets away from the sanitary sewer drains.

- Review fuel tank areas and new automatic systems outside the sanitary sewer, if applicable.

4. Handle Chemicals and Fuel with Care

- Develop policies and procedures for chemical acceptance, purchase, and storage. If you have these chemicals, make sure that they are stored properly and that their storage is monitored.

- Inspect and maintain fuel and chemical storage systems. Check all fuel tanks to ensure that there is no corrosion or leakage. Look for any evidence that the storage tanks are not being maintained properly. 

- Keep your system clean. Keep a clean and well-maintained storage system. Be sure to maintain any automatic filling systems. Inspect the storage area regularly to be sure it is clean and well-maintained.

- Avoid pesticide and fertilizer applications. On playing fields and school grounds, avoid pesticide application or fertilizer application around the drinking water protection area. Also avoid any pest management plans, pesticides, or herbicides that could contaminate the drinking water protection area.

- Limit lead safety. In drinking water protection areas, use non-lead-based paint systems or paint systems that do not contain lead.

5. Train Staff on Chemical and Emergency Procedures

- Educate staff to be sure they know how to properly store, use, and dispose of hazardous materials.

- Have a team of teachers who will use these materials. Post signs to ensure responsible use and provide for collection of hazardous waste from shops, storage areas, laboratories, and auto service. Label waste containers so materials are not mixed.

- Be sure staff are trained to keep those who are in need of training informed.

- Practice access to all wells and water supply facilities. Each school, in cooperation with its local and state police department, should develop a plan for first responders to access all wells and facilities.


- Prevent access to all hazardous or toxic materials. Prevent children and unauthorized users from entering the facility. Use locks and access systems designed to prohibit unauthorized access.

- Keep all hazardous or toxic materials behind locked doors. Store hazardous chemicals in a secure, locked area.

- Once access to your wells are no longer needed or used, make the area accessible to the public by making it safe and secure.

7. Communicate with Staff, Students, and Neighbors

- Get students involved as caretakers of the school’s drinking water supply. They can be trained to perform simple daily checks.

- Locate water tanks, water storage facilities, and other concerns to provide a drinking water protection plan. Map the wellhead and secure all access points. Include a thorough assessment plan.

- Post signs that advise students and teachers of the monitoring area.

8. Save Water and Money

- Conserve water in classrooms and all areas of the school. Water conservation reduces your utility bill and saves your school money.

9. Pay Attention to Drinking Water When the School Expands

- Locate new parking areas, fuel tanks, and other facilities outside the drinking water protection area. If possible, do not locate new facilities inside the drinking water protection area.

- Install new wells for the use of drinking water collection devices (such as well pumps, included in fertilizer application, and other storage systems, and hazardous waste storage systems, and hazardous waste systems. Include other, air intakes and electrical and chemical systems.

- Don’t install new fuel tanks in the ground in areas where hazardous waste or hazardous waste storage systems are located.

10. Change Plans and Procedures over Time

- Continue to make changes to improve the school’s protection program and ensure that all staff are up to date.

- Where changes are made, your access procedures to your school’s drinking water supply should be filled out and used to get help when needed.