

Methane in Well Water

Frequently Asked Questions

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This fact sheet answers questions about methane gas in private drinking water wells, and lists actions people can take to protect their health.



What is methane?

- Methane is a colorless, odorless gas that can dissolve in water.
- Methane in water escapes quickly to the air as a gas.
- Methane gas can build up in poorly ventilated areas, such as bathrooms, laundry rooms, and in the well itself. If too much of the gas builds up, it can cause a fire or explosion.
- Methane can also change the chemistry of your well water, making your water unpalatable and releasing iron and manganese that can adversely affect taste and stain plumbing fixtures.

How do I know if methane is in my water?

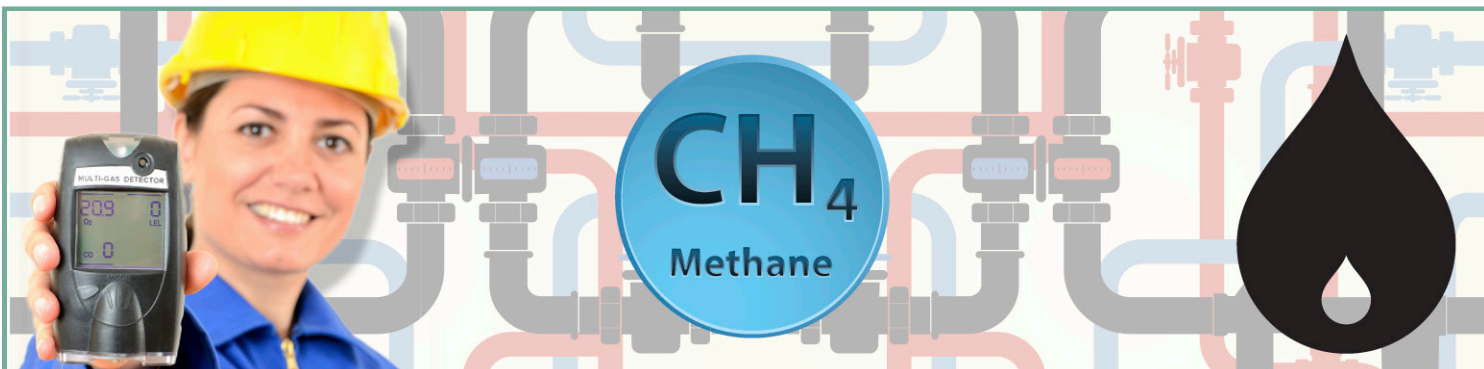
- If your water has bubbles similar to carbonated soda or if it looks white or milky, methane might be in the water.

What can I do if methane is in my water?

- Put a gas detector in your home to warn you if methane in the air in your home is near or at an unsafe level. Carefully read the directions that come with the detector. Make sure you know how to use the detector.
- Ventilate your home to lower the amount of methane gas in the air, especially in small or enclosed rooms where you use the most water, such as the bathroom, laundry room, and kitchen.
- Have a vent installed on your wellhead.
- Keep sparks or open flames away from the wellhead and out of enclosed areas of your home, such as the bathroom and laundry room.
- Install a water treatment system to remove dissolved methane from your well water before it enters your home.

Where can I get a gas leak detector and how do I use it?

- You can buy a gas leak detector that will alert you with light or sound at most home improvement or hardware stores. Look for one that will detect methane. It might be called a gas leak detector, a combustible gas detector, or an explosive gas detector.
- Follow the directions included with the detector to find the best place to install it. Generally, good places to install detectors inside the home are those where the most groundwater use occurs. This include the bathroom, laundry room, utility room, and kitchen.



What should I do if the gas leak detector alarms?

- A gas detector warns you when levels of some gases in the air might be dangerous.
- If you hear the alarm, open the windows in your home and put out any open flames, such as cigarettes or candles.
- To be safe, you should get your family out of the house.
- Call 911 at a place away from your house.
- Do not go back into your house until the fire department checks your house and says it is safe.

How do I ventilate my home?

- In small or enclosed areas where you use a lot of water, such as the bathroom, laundry room, or kitchen, make sure you turn on a fan or open a window when water is running for more than a few minutes.

How can I vent my water well for methane?

- You can put a vent on your wellhead that will let the methane gas escape before it enters your home.
- Check with your state environmental and health or local public health agencies for a list of certified water well drillers and pump installers that can install a well cap for you. County extension agents may also be able to give you advice about your private well quality – to find your county extension visit <https://nifa.usda.gov/partners-and-extension-map?state=All&type=Extension>.

For more information call 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or visit <https://www.cdc.gov/info>.

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