

# Water driller seeks tougher standards

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Alan Eades of Eades Drilling has seen practically everything in his 20-year career as a well driller — not all of it good.

Eades has photos documenting much of what he has seen—everything from improperly installed wells to wells packed with dead animals. All of which, Eades says can be prevented if the state would create stricter licensing requirements.

Currently, becoming a well driller in New Mexico is easy, just fill out a simple application form, send the a photo of your drilling rig and bond to the Office of the State Engineer and you're in business.

Eades finds the laxity of New Mexico's practices especially hard to understand when state and county leaders are talking about finding ways to protect the Ogallala Aquifer.

An improperly installed well, Eades points out, is just a conduit for allowing contaminated runoff into the aquifer. While he has seen some bad work, Eades doesn't believe most of those people mean to provide substandard work.

"I don't think most people would set out to do something wrong," Eades said. "I just think they don't know better."

The standards Eades, and the

New Mexico Ground Water Association, are pushing would require that well drillers take a rigorous test to obtain a license. They also would have to enroll in continuing education classes.

Eades points out that even barbers and cosmetologists have to take a test.

"Your barber has to take a test before they'll let him cut your hair," Eades said, "but we're drilling into an unreplaceable aquifer and we don't have to take a test."

Paul Saavedra, director of the water rights unit for the State Engineer Office, agrees that the standards aren't as stringent as they could be.

"Because we don't have a test, it's very easy for anybody to become a well driller and we've had a few bad well drillers," Saavedra said.

He added that he expects to have a new set of requirements ready in about two years.

Dennis Holmberg, Lea County manager and Lea County Water User's Association member, said he supports Eades' idea.

"I am aware of Mr. Eades (efforts) there," Holmberg said. "I personally think that would be a good step, but I am not aware that the water users association has taken a stance on that particular issue."

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**Paul Saavedra**  
*State Engineer Office*

He added, however, that creating stricter guidelines and testing for well drillers fell within the parameters of what the water user's association wants.

Eades, who also holds a well drillers license from Texas, said he installs all his wells to Texas' standards—filling up the space around the pipe with sand and gravel and capping the area around the top so runoff can't migrate down into the aquifer.

"It's not required (in New Mexico) and it should be a standard business practice, but it's not," Eades said.

Eades said filling up the area around the well with gravel is a simple step everyone should take, and he's seen what results when people don't do that.

He said he has found everything from rats to skunks inside improperly installed wells.

Eades recalled an incident about 10 years ago when somebody from the Eunice area called him to come out and fix their well. The person reported finding gray fibers in their water. At first Eades thought a plastic part of the pump had gone out and started shredding, but the person added that the water smelled bad and tasted funny.

When Eades got there he found the well packed out with dead rats. The pump was held up by a 2-by-4 plank and left an 8-inch opening around the pump.

"The rats, they smell water they go toward it. They head down in that hole and they wind up in the bottom," Eades said.

Eades said they wanted to just drill a new well but he was able to restore the well after a lengthy rehabilitation process. More importantly, he added, the problem should never have existed to begin with.

"If there had been some construction guidelines on the wells and if the pump installers had been licensed and required to fix the problem (when) they see things like that, they wouldn't have ever had that problem," Eades said.

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