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## *IDPH News Release*

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### **Iowa Well Rescue Demonstrates Common Rural Safety Hazard**

#### *IDPH program aids in closure of abandoned wells and cisterns*

The rescue last week of an Iowa toddler from a southern Iowa well demonstrates the risks associated with abandoned wells and cisterns in the state. It is estimated there are as many as 200,000 wells remaining in Iowa. Many pose a safety hazard because of contaminated water or improper closure. The Iowa Department of Public Health's (IDPH) Grants to Counties program provides funding assistance to make wells safe.

Nearly all (98) Iowa counties choose to participate in the IDPH Grants to Counties program, which is funded through taxes on sales of pesticides. Each county receives approximately \$17,000 per year to offer private water well owners:

- Free water tests.
- Grants of up to \$600 per individual for well reconstruction (water-tight well caps or replacement of casing).
- Grants of up to \$400 to plug or close abandoned wells and up to \$300 for cisterns.

“The program is primarily a water quality protection program,” said IDPH Environmental Health Division Director Ken Sharp. “However, this week’s accident involving a child falling into a well demonstrates the program is critical to other safety issues.” Sharp says with Iowa’s agricultural heritage, wells and cisterns are a familiar sight in the state. “Many of those wells and cisterns have not been properly closed and are, unfortunately, accidents waiting to happen.”

Through the IDPH Grants to Counties program, over 7,000 water tests are conducted annually, in addition to the closure of nearly 2,000 wells and about 175 cisterns. For information about the Grants to Counties program, private water well owners should call their local county Environmental Health office at 319-824-1212 Ext 2.

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