

Olmsted County: Initial Overview of Nitrate Levels in Private Wells (2014)

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) determines current nitrate-nitrogen concentrations in private wells, on a township scale, through the Township Testing Program. The MDA has identified townships throughout the state that are vulnerable to groundwater contamination and have significant row crop production. The MDA plans to offer nitrate testing to 70,000 private well owners in over 300 townships by 2019.

Each selected township is offered testing in two steps, the “initial” sampling and the “follow-up” sampling. In the initial sampling, all township homeowners using private wells are sent a nitrate test kit. If nitrate is detected in their initial sample, the homeowner is offered a follow-up nitrate test, pesticide test and well site visit. Trained MDA staff visit willing homeowners to resample the well and then conduct a site assessment. The assessment helps to identify possible non-fertilizer sources of nitrate and to see the condition of the well. A well with construction problems may be more susceptible to contamination.

Olmsted County Highlights

- # Vulnerable Townships Tested: 11
- Households Receiving Kits: 3,308
- Number of Wells Tested: 1,057
- % Wells Over the Health Standard: 5%

The MDA and Olmsted County Environmental Services worked together to select townships and implement the nitrate testing project. The following townships were selected: **Dover, Elmira, Eyota, Farmington, High Forest, New Haven, Orion, Oronoco, Pleasant Grove, Quincy, and Viola**. The initial sampling in Olmsted County started in 2014 and follow-up sampling was finished in 2015.

Results

The initial well dataset contains all wells tested (1,057) regardless of well construction issues and sources of nitrate. The Health Standard for nitrate-N in drinking water is 10 mg/L. The results from the initial well dataset are summarized in the table and map below.

Next Steps

Once the follow-up sampling is completed, the MDA conducts an analysis of the results and prepares a final report for each county (visit www.mda.state.mn.us/townshiptesting). The Olmsted County Final Report will be available in 2017.

The MDA uses the final results to determine if additional action is needed, as described in the Minnesota Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan (NFMP). Find more information about the NFMP on the MDA website at www.mda.state.mn.us/nfmp.

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Table: Olmsted County Initial Well Dataset Results, 2016.

Township	Number of Wells Tested*	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Percent of Wells ≥ 10 mg/L
		Nitrate-N mg/L or PPM				
Dover	49	<0.25	18.2	3.8	2.1	10.2%
Elmira	50	<0.25	32.0	3.5	1.2	6.0%
Eyota	54	<0.25	14.5	1.6	<0.25	5.6%
Farmington	56	<0.25	22.4	7.1	8.1	25.0%
High Forest	143	<0.25	13.6	1.1	<0.25	1.4%
New Haven	169	<0.25	21.5	1.4	<0.25	3.6%
Orion	73	<0.25	14.7	1.1	<0.25	1.4%
Oronoco	255	<0.25	16.1	1.3	<0.25	2.0%
Pleasant Grove	100	<0.25	16.2	1.4	<0.25	3.0%
Quincy	35	<0.25	22.7	5.3	5.4	8.6%
Viola	73	<0.25	19.6	3.5	0.3	6.8%
Total	1057	<0.25	32.0	2.1	<0.25	5.0%

*All well types included.

Figure: Olmsted County Initial Well Dataset Map, 2016.

