

The Value of a Well Inspection for Home Buyers

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With all of the expenses related to buying a home, buyers may feel reluctant to pay for a thorough investigation of their well. But for buyers who invest in a well yield test and receive results showing a failing system, these assessments can provide critical information for negotiations. Tim Shotzberger, President of Home Land Septic Consulting, says that approximately 3-5% of his clients residing in Maryland's northern counties have failed to meet the state standard of 1 gallon per minute.

The yield test, which determines how many gallons per minute a well system can produce, is the most thorough investigation that a well company can offer. Yield tests require running the water for an extended

period of time, usually between three to six hours. During this time, the well professional will be taking measurements and examining how the system's components (like the pump and pressure tank) are performing over time. By inspecting the well system's performance under such demanding conditions, the yield test provides the most accurate assessment of the well. As such, it is also the most expensive service, costing approximately \$300–400. (Please Note: All cost estimates are for reference only and can vary significantly by company, location, and circumstances.) But as Mike Isom, a Project Manager from Michael Barlow Well Drilling notes, "You can get the yield from the well log, but, if the well still has the original equipment, this data can be 10–15 years old. The well

What happens if a yield test fails?

If a yield test fails, the seller and buyer can consider the following options:

- Drill the existing well deeper (approximately \$5,000);
- Drill a new well (approximately \$10,000–15,000);
- Hydrofracture the area around the well (approximately \$3,000)
 - This option only applies to wells drilled into bedrock. The hydrofracturing process clears out clogs in the aquifer. Shotzberger says,

"This is not a long-term solution, but because it is relatively inexpensive, it can help buy home buyers some time until they can afford to fix the problem."

- Install a holding tank in the basement (approximately \$3,500 for a 300-gallon tank, \$5,500 for a 500-gallon tank)



Licensed well companies typically offer three services for a well inspection. The full and modified yield tests, and a potability test, often required by the lender. Well companies typically offer this service to give their clients a one-stop shopping experience. Because well companies do not operate water testing laboratories, the staff are commonly licensed as water samplers, who are trained to take, store, and transfer a water sample to a laboratory. If the client decides to hire a well company for the potability test, make sure that the company's staff have obtained their license in water sampling and that the company contracts with a state-certified lab. (For more detailed information about contaminants and the University of Maryland Extension's recommendations on water testing, see the February/March issue of this magazine.)

may not be performing the same after all that time." And without the yield test, a buyer cannot be certain of the well's condition.

Currently, the only county in the state to require a yield test for a property transfer is Baltimore County. But Isom has seen an increase in the number of REALTORS® recommending this test to clients in neighboring counties. Due to the length of this test, Shotzberger recommends that REALTORS® prepare sellers for the process. Not only will the inspectors need access to the property for several hours, but the test also requires using the current owner's electricity to run the system, both of which can be very frustrating for an unprepared seller.

For anxious home buyers fretting about the cost of all the possible inspections, many well companies offer a modified yield test. Because this test requires running the water for only 30–60 minutes, it is more affordable, costing between \$150–200. While the assessment is not as thorough, it does give a general sense of the well's condition and performance.

While some general home inspectors may offer well inspections, the University of Maryland Extension recommends working with a licensed well company. The home inspector will charge extra for a well inspection, typically at similar prices as licensed well companies, so buyers benefit from a more accurate assessment derived from a well professional's experience and specialized equipment. When it comes to finding the right well professional, John Boris, a Geologist Program Consultant at the Maryland Department of the Environment, recommends finding a licensed well professional with experience and local knowledge. Along with ensuring that the professional is licensed by the Maryland Board of Well Drillers, he also suggests asking whether the individual holds certifications from other states or third-party organizations, like the National Groundwater Association, or for other specialized work, such as water sampling. Boris notes, "I realize you can have all the credentials, and not provide good service, but anything that represents more education beyond what is required should be viewed as beneficial to all parties." 🇺🇸