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Well Driller Program Update

*Kent Wilkins, Director
Oklahoma Well Driller Program*

What a busy and exciting fall it has been for staff of the OWRB! From the many requests for lists of licensed drillers and pump installers, I assume that the contractors have also been extremely busy. Both are good indicators of a positive atmosphere for this industry.

Since September, the Well Drillers and Pump Installers Advisory Council and support staff have met three times. Although still in its infancy, the Council has already demonstrated its worth through suggested revisions to our rules and regulations, identifying expenditures from the indemnity fund and planning for future seminars. I encourage every contractor to meet with a Council member and let them know what issues need to be addressed by the Board to strengthen the water well drilling industry in Oklahoma. Our council members are the

licensed contractor's representative and spokesperson to the OWRB.

As mentioned elsewhere in the *Drillers' Log*, the Council has scheduled three educational seminars in the upcoming weeks. Council members have been invaluable to the planning and organization of these seminars and we are very excited about the topics to be presented and the speakers who have volunteered their time to participate. Registration is free and lunch will be provided, at no charge, by Pumps of Oklahoma.

I strongly encourage all licensed water well drillers and pump installers to participate in one of these extremely worthwhile seminars. It's a chance to learn new installation techniques as well as network with other contractors. Please contact me or our Advisory Council members for additional information.

OWRB Appoints Well Drillers Council

Eight individuals have been appointed to the new Water Well Drillers and Pump Installers Advisory Council, established last year by the State Legislature. Members were confirmed at the OWRB's August meeting.

According to Mike Mathis, Chief of the OWRB's Planning and Management Division, the Advisory Council organization replaces the informal ad hoc Well Drillers Committee.

"The Well Drillers Committee was comprised entirely of volunteers, but the Well Drillers Council members are officially appointed by the Board. I think by formalizing this organization we provide the necessary leadership to ensure proper well construction and prevent potential groundwater contamination," Mathis pointed out.

The authorizing legislation -- authored by Rep. M.C. Leist, Sen. Frank Shurden and Rep. Jack Bonny -- directs the Water Board to appoint Council members. They are selected from among the 1,100 commercial water well drillers and pump installation contractors licensed by the OWRB.



Larry Hudgens, Danny Ewbank, Cheryl Cohenour, Robert Keyes, Kari Sever, Kent Wilkins and Mike Ritter

Well Drillers Advisory Council, *Continued from Page 1*

"The Board has selected an extremely diverse and skilled group. Collectively, these representatives account for 112 years of experience in Oklahoma's drilling industry," Mathis said.

The eight Advisory Council members are: Danny Ewbank (Chairman), Fairview; Kari Sever (Vice-Chairperson), Tryon; Robert Keyes, Norman; Cheryl Cohenour, Tulsa; Mike Ritter, Guymon; Dala Bowlin, Inola; Larry Hudgens, Elk City; and Duane Smith, OWRB Executive Director (ex-officio member).

The members are charged with developing rules to comply with standards that govern water well drilling activi-

ties in Oklahoma. The most important aspect of these rules is to promote professional well construction and absolutely minimize potential avenues for surface contaminants to pollute the state's invaluable groundwater resources. Also in this regard, according to Mathis, the Council will promote education of the state's drillers and pump contractors through scheduled workshops and related meetings.

The Advisory Council will also direct the expenditure of funds from the Well Drillers and Pump Installers Remedial Indemnity Fund, an account earmarked for remediation of sites contaminated as a result of improper well construction. The Fund is also utilized for inspections, licensing, enforcement, and education.

Judge Issues Injunction Against Johnston County Well Driller

Prompted by recent alleged violations, the District Court judge of Johnston County has granted the Oklahoma Water Resources Board a temporary injunction to prevent a local, unlicensed water well driller from unlawfully practicing his trade in the state.

The order against Max Jones, a driller from Mannsville whose license expired in 2000, and his firm, Jones Water Well Drilling, was issued October 5 by the Honorable Judge Robert M. Highsmith. The OWRB sought the injunction -- which prevents Jones Drilling from drilling or plugging groundwater wells and test holes, observation wells and heat exchange wells until such time as the OWRB issues a final administrative order -- in response to numerous reports of unlawful and poorly-constructed wells drilled by Jones. The Johnston County District Attorney has also filed misdemeanor charges against Jones, which could result in substantial fines for the operator. An administrative hearing was held for Jones' firm on September 10; the nine-member Water Board revoked Mr. Jones's license at its November 13 meeting.

According to Kent Wilkins, Coordinator of the state's Well Drillers Program, violations of minimum construction standards for wells drilled by Jones Drilling were identified by OWRB field inspectors at multiple sites in Johnston, Marshall, and Bryan Counties.

"The observed wells had no cement seal, which is the primary mechanism to prevent contamination of groundwater, an important source of water supply for numerous municipalities and rural water districts in Oklahoma," Wilkins pointed out. "Mr. Jones has also been responsible for numerous unplugged test holes and has drilled and completed at least one well in an underground saltwater formation, another violation of state well construction standards and a potential health hazard to the public."

The OWRB licenses water well drillers in Oklahoma and, in concert with the state's Water Well Advisory Council, sets minimum construction standards that must be followed in the completion of water wells.

"Shoddy or irresponsible well construction in Oklahoma will not be tolerated by the Water Board," emphasized Duane A. Smith, OWRB Executive Director, "and we will pursue all available means to alleviate such problems and prosecute individuals who purposely ignore state regulations intended to protect our vitally important groundwater supplies."

Smith added that citizens who have concerns about improper construction of their water well or related questions should contact the OWRB in Oklahoma City at (405) 530-8800 or the agency's McAlester Field Office at (918) 426-5435.

Statewide Well Driller Seminars Announced

The OWRB will hold seminars for well drillers and pump installers at three separate locations throughout Oklahoma in November and December. According to Kent Wilkins, Coordinator of the OWRB's Well Drillers and Pump Installers Program, the Water Board conducts these workshops each year to educate licensed operators on new technology developed in the industry and rule changes. The seminars also provide information on rule changes and serve as a vehicle for the agency to gather input from industry representatives on future revisions to rules and regulations.

Registration for the seminars is free of charge and begins at 8:00 a.m. Each seminar will begin at 9:00 a.m. and speakers will present a wide variety of topics, including pump installation, geothermal well installation, rig safety, bentonite sealing properties, and equipment decontamination. Lunch will be provided at all seminars (courtesy of Pumps of Okla-

homa). Attendance at the seminars will qualify as Continuing Education Units for several adjacent state programs.

Both licensed contractors and concerned citizens are encouraged to attend and provide input on Oklahoma's water well drilling regulations. For more information, contact Kent Wilkins or Theda Adkisson at (405) 530-8800.

The dates and locations for the seminars are:

- November 28: Woodward, High Plains Technology Center, Rm 117, 3921 34th Street
- December 4: Oklahoma City, Metro Technology Center, 1900 Springlake Drive
- December 5: Broken Arrow, Tulsa Technology Center, 4600 South Oliver