

Diane MacInnes

We attended a meeting held by the New Mexico Environment Department a few years ago about using wastewater from oil & gas development for agricultural uses: crops and livestock. I strongly object to any such use. As we continue to stretch the limits on "allowable" amounts of toxins to enter our food supply, rates of cancer, neurological diseases, and other illnesses continue to rise. Unfortunately in every state the voices that seem to have the ear of the environment departments are the industries that waste and contaminate our water. I expect the NMED to do better. We need to have public health and free access to safe drinking water for families to be the highest priority.

Please read the summary below of a recent New York Times article whose link I am also including:

WATER REGULATION IN THE U.S. IS A MESS
A Tangle of Rules to Protect America's Water Is Falling Short - New York Times

The Times asked all 50 states how they manage groundwater. The answers show why the country's aquifers are in trouble. America's stewardship of groundwater, one of its most precious resources, relies on a lax and outdated patchwork of state and local rules. In many places, oversight is all but nonexistent, a New York Times analysis has found.

The majority of states don't know how many wells they have. Many have incomplete records or no records at all and don't register the millions of household wells that dot the country.

Even states that do try to count wells or regulate groundwater use often have other problems. Some carve out exemptions for powerful industries like agriculture, one of the nation's biggest users of groundwater. And every state relies to some extent on well owners self-reporting their water use, raising the risk of deception by users big and small.

Regulations in some states, including Oklahoma, are guided by a principle of letting users extract groundwater at rates that exceed an aquifer's ability to recharge. Some hydrologists call it groundwater "mining."

Nationwide, the jumble of regulations that The Times identified has fed an industry of lawyers and consultants who help big users follow the rules, and also, sometimes, to take advantage of them. "People are shopping around for where they can exploit groundwater," said Reba Epler, a lawyer who works on water rights cases in Wyoming and New Mexico. — Dionne Searcey and Delger Erdenesanaa

Read the full story, part of our investigative project into the national groundwater crisis.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/11/02/climate/us-groundwater-depletion-rules.html?unlocked_article_code=1.70w.kCmI.9SfrcVDU7Xhy&smid=url-share