

Ground Water Cleanup Frequently Asked Questions

Below are answers to several questions frequently asked about DEQ requirements for characterization and remediation of contaminated groundwater.

Q: How do I know what groundwater requirements apply to my project or activity?

The Department of Environmental Quality is designated as the groundwater protection agency for all activities that are within the agency's jurisdictional areas of environmental responsibility.¹ DEQ's charge under state law is to determine what actions are required to ensure the protection and quality of the state's groundwater.

Water quality standards are set and enforced by DEQ.² DEQ rules that implement the water quality standards are found in DEQ's Water Quality Standards Implementation Plan³ and DEQ's General Water Quality Standards.⁴ LPD program rules, including hazardous waste, solid waste and UIC, and Federal requirements may also apply. If your project/activity is not enrolled in one of the LPD programs, LPD can designate a Program Manager to work with you to determine applicable project requirements.

Q: Why does it matter that the groundwater has been contaminated, especially if no one is drinking the water?

The state of Oklahoma recognizes that water is a limited resource. Its quality and distribution must be protected to ensure safe supplies for humans and wildlife.

It is unlawful for any person to cause pollution of any waters of the state.⁵ Oklahoma statutes define "waters of the State" to include groundwater.⁶ DEQ is required by statute to develop groundwater protection practices to prevent groundwater contamination and take all actions necessary to ensure the protection and quality of the state's groundwater supply.⁷

Groundwater contamination tends to move and disperse with the groundwater, spreading pollution over wider areas. A pollutant plume may intersect with water wells, or discharge into surface water in seeps and springs, expanding areas where the water supply is unsafe for humans and wildlife.

Q: This is an urban setting. All the groundwater is already contaminated. Why is contamination an issue?

DEQ's charge under state law is to determine what actions are required to ensure the protection and quality of the state's groundwater supply. To date, DEQ has generally found groundwater in urban settings to be clean enough to determine the extent of contamination for a specific contaminant plume.