



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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### **New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection State Well Drillers and Pump Installers Examining and Advisory Board Meeting Minutes for January 16, 2025**

*Approved by the Board on February 20, 2025*

**Board Members Participating Via Telephone/Microsoft Teams:** Art Becker (Chairman), Gary Poppe (Vice-Chairman), Gordon Craig, Dave Lyman, Eric Hoffmann, Joe Yost, and Richard Dalton

**Board Members Absent:** Steve Domber

**Board Legal Representative Present:** Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Jill Denyes, NJ Division of Law

**NJDEP Water Supply (Bureau of Water Allocation and Well Permitting) Staff Present:** Kat Burkhard, Steve Reya, Mark Miller, Michael Schumacher, Mark Ortega, Steve Vargo, and Jillian Walker

**Other NJDEP Staff Present:** Don Hirsch, Northern Water Compliance and Enforcement; Alexandra Carone, Geological Mapping and Coastal Geology Section

**Members of the Public:** Brian McGuire, MB Drilling LLC

#### **1. Call to Order and Introductions-**

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 am with a quorum present via Microsoft Teams and telephone. Notice of the meeting and instructions on how to participate by video or phone were listed on the Board's website.

#### **2. Review and Certification of December 19, 2024, Meeting Minutes-**

A. Becker asked if anyone had any comments on the draft minutes from the December 19, 2024, Board meeting. No comments were made.

**A motion to approve the draft minutes from December 19, 2024, was made by G. Poppe, seconded by D. Lyman. Board members absent from the December 19, 2024, Board meeting, R. Dalton and J. Yost, abstained from the vote.**

**3. Review of License Applicants-**

A. Becker summarized the list of license applicants which were approved by the Department. There was one Master well driller applicant and two Environmental Resource and Geotechnical (ERG) well driller license applicants. A. Becker asked if anyone had any comments on the list of license applicants. No other comments were made.

**A motion to approve the license applicants was made by J. Yost, seconded by G. Poppe, and approved unanimously.**

Below is a list of license applicants approved for licensure:

License Type	Applicant Name	Employer
Master	Matthew G. Freck	Unit-Tech Drilling, Co., Inc.
ERG	George R. Zackman	Craig Test Boring Co. Inc.
ERG	Thomas J. Wall	Craig Test Boring Co. Inc.

**4. Continuing Education Point (CEP) Completion Status for Licensees-**

M. Ortega presented a collection of data representing progress made by licensed well drillers and pump installers towards completing the continuing education requirements for the 2026 license renewal cycle. Data collected represented progress starting April 1, 2023, and extended through January 8, 2025.

As of January 8, 12% of licensees have met the CEP requirements, however this is mostly individuals who are newly licensed or have recently upgraded their licenses. 43% of licensees have started earning their CEPs but have not yet met all the CEP requirements. 45% have not yet started earning CEPs. A full breakdown of the data can be found in the chart below.

M. Ortega explained that the continuing education cycle ends on March 31, 2026. The Department will be sending out a reminder letter in March to licensees to remind them of this and other important dates. Another reminder letter will be sent out in late 2025 or early 2026 as well.

A. Becker asked the Board for comments on the data presented. A. Becker remarked that there are over 100 licensed master well drillers in New Jersey, which is more than he thought. M. Ortega noted that this number is less Master well drillers than have been licensed in the past. A. Becker complimented the report and shared his appreciation.

License Type	Status			
	Complete	Incomplete	Not Started	Grand Total
Dewatering	2	4	5	<b>11</b>
ERG	36	81	130	<b>247</b>
Journeyman (Class B)	3	0	5	<b>8</b>
Journeyman	19	70	83	<b>172</b>
Master	8	56	37	<b>101</b>
Pump Installer	20	94	59	<b>173</b>
VCLG	1	2	6	<b>9</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>721</b>
	<i>12%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>45%</i>	

##### 5. Bureau of Water Allocation and Well Permitting (Bureau) Enforcement & Field Work Update-

S. Vargo briefly discussed some enforcement referrals. He noted that Southern Water Compliance and Enforcement has recently taken on 10 referrals from the Bureau regarding issues of non-compliance. S. Vargo then discussed three field inspections that occurred since the last update he provided to the Board. The first notable inspection was to observe the drilling of a well which needed specific well construction requirements, notably the need to double-case the well due to the location being close to saltwater. During drilling activities, the drillers on site were unable to continue well installation and it was decided they would return to the site the next day to finish installation. The drillers planned to introduce water into the borehole to prevent the borehole from collapsing by maintaining a head of water, but after Bureau staff left for the evening, reportedly determined they would not be able to adequately maintain a head of water on the borehole, and casing was installed and grouted without Bureau staff present to oversee the work. The drillers provided verification of the grout quantity used and field notes on the well installation. The Bureau decided the well did not need to be decommissioned and re-drilled in the presence of staff based on the details that the contractor was able to supply.

The next notable field inspection involved the sealing and replacement of a well for which the driller had previously received a Notice of Non-Compliance (NONC) for not meeting permit requirements to install additional casing. The well was inspected in December by Bureau staff, and televised by the well driller of record, where it was confirmed the well did not meet the additional casing requirements. The driller of the well in violation subcontracted another drilling company to drill the replacement well which was installed in accordance with N.J.A.C. 7:9D, under the supervision of Bureau staff. The driller in violation attempted to seal the non-conforming well with bentonite chips but saw bentonite chips at the well surface after pouring only approximately half of the amount required to fill the well. The sealing of the non-conforming well is an ongoing enforcement issue.

S. Vargo then gave an NONC update, stating 13 NONCs were issued in December 2024, and provided a summary of reasons for issuance. These reasons included failure to obtain a deviation prior to using an unapproved geothermal grout mix in competent rock, failure to notify the Department prior to well drilling activities per permit requirements, and improper monitoring well construction in competent rock. S. Vargo then provided a summary of enforcement meetings since the last update, including meetings to go over a case going to trial and meetings to discuss new NONCs.

D. Lyman inquired about details on the geothermal grout mix being used without a deviation as mentioned in the list of NONCs recently issued. S. Vargo provided details on the materials used

in the grout mixture and reiterated it is not an approved grout mix to be used in competent rock. A. Becker asked what the remedy for a violation of this type would be and S. Vargo explained the Bureau will need to receive and review a response to the NONCs before making this decision. D. Lyman pointed out health departments typically do not inspect geothermal well installations despite them posing an equal risk to groundwater as other well installations.

D. Hirsch added that Water Compliance and Enforcement's document preparation unit has been assigned 14 cases from Well Permitting in recent weeks. D. Hirsch noted that three of those cases were final agency actions. D. Hirsch informed the Board that Well Permitting has an upcoming hearing in court for a well driller who allegedly improperly constructed a double-cased well in Cape May County.

M. Miller provided an update on letters the Bureau has sent property owners, which direct them to seal abandoned wells, stating more have been issued since the last enforcement update, and referrals for failing to act on orders to seal will be sent to Enforcement soon. A. Becker commented that he has noticed an increase in enforcement output from the Department.

#### **6. 2024 Well Permitting Section Summary-**

S. Reya introduced a report created by M. Schumacher summarizing well permit, record and decommissioning review output by the Bureau. Also included were totals of completed Well Search Questionnaires, decommissioning approval requests processed, NONCs issued, and site visits conducted in 2024. M. Schumacher noted permit approvals are comparable to last year's numbers and align with the 10-year trend of permit approvals. Nearly 30,000 permits, records and decommissionings were reviewed in 2024 by about 10 staff members with an average of roughly 26% of these needing to be returned to drillers technically deficient. M. Schumacher asked drillers to consider double checking work for typos before submission, and instating succession planning and training of new staff. The Bureau conducted almost 2,000 well searches in 2024, while also receiving almost 2,000 search requests where a permit number was provided, which points to the use of the Department's DataMiner resource.

A. Becker thanked M. Schumacher for his work in putting together the report, and commented on technically deficient permits, records and decommissionings being double the amount of work for both well drillers and Bureau staff. A. Becker asked if a list of the most common technical deficiencies could be generated to assist the drillers. M. Schumacher explained why a report of this nature could not be run and reiterates checking submissions for typos as this would help reduce the number of reports returned technically deficient.

J. Yost asked if a report could be put together to find out how many permits for public supply wells were issued in 2024, and M. Schumacher stated this report could be put together. A. Becker noted seeing trends of this nature in the drilling industry would be of interest to the Board. D. Lyman asked how many permits are sent back technically deficient for owner information and suggested there may be an increase in these as this information has become harder to find online. M. Schumacher stated that the Department is currently working on upgrading review screens, noting this will take time away from well reviews, and that the new permit and decommissioning screens will have additional requirement fields which will hopefully mitigate the return of these documents to confirm owner information.

**7. Program Updates-**

S. Reya provided an update regarding progress made on the Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) guidance document, noting there is a meeting next week to work on it, and updates on progress will be shared with the Board.

M. Miller provided a drought update, noting there has been no change in drought status since the December Board meeting. He also mentioned that S. Domber put together an article on lost and destroyed wells for Licensed Site Remediation Professionals in New Jersey. The full article can be found on Well Permitting's website. The rule team for the upcoming renewal of N.J.A.C. 7:9D Well Construction and Maintenance; Sealing of Abandoned Wells has been put together, and the Board was asked to email any ideas for edits to the rule.

K. Burkhard thanked the Board for continuing to serve and provided an update on Board appointments.

**8. New Business and Public Comments-**

A. Becker asked if there were any new business or public comments. There was no new business or public comment made.

**9. Adjournment-**

The next meeting will be held Thursday, February 20, 2025.

**A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by G. Craig, seconded by D. Lyman and approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:14 am.**