

**U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION I**

**LOW STRESS (low flow) PURGING AND SAMPLING  
PROCEDURE FOR THE COLLECTION OF  
GROUND WATER SAMPLES  
FROM MONITORING  
WELLS**



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**I. SCOPE & APPLICATION**

This standard operating procedure (SOP) provides a general framework for collecting ground water samples that are indicative of mobile organic and inorganic loads at ambient flow conditions (both the dissolved fraction and the fraction associated with mobile particulates). The SOP emphasizes the need to minimize stress by low water-level drawdowns, and low pumping rates (usually less than 1 liter/min) in order to collect samples with minimal alterations to water chemistry. This SOP is aimed primarily at sampling monitoring wells that can accept a submersible pump and have a screen, or open interval length of 10 feet or less (this is the most common situation). However, this procedure is flexible and can be used in a variety of well construction and ground-water yield situations. Samples thus obtained are suitable for analyses of ground water contaminants (volatile and semi-volatile organic analytes, pesticides, PCBs, metals and other inorganics), or other naturally occurring analytes.

This procedure does not address the collection of samples from wells containing light or dense non-aqueous phase liquids (LNAPLs and DNAPLs). For this the reader may wish to check: Cohen, R.M. and J.W. Mercer, 1993, DNAPL Site Evaluation; C.K. Smoley (CRC Press), Boca Raton, Florida and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1992, RCRA Ground-Water Monitoring: Draft Technical Guidance; Washington, DC (EPA/530-R-93-001).

The screen, or open interval of the monitoring well should be optimally located (both laterally and vertically) to intercept existing contaminant plume(s) or along flowpaths of potential contaminant releases. It is presumed that the analytes of interest move (or potentially move) primarily through the more permeable zones within the screen, or open interval.

<p>Use of trademark names does not imply endorsement by U.S.EPA but is intended only to assist in identification of a specific type of device.</p>
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Proper well construction and development cannot be overemphasized, since the use of installation techniques that are appropriate to the hydrogeologic setting often prevents "problem well" situations from occurring. It is also recommended that as part of development or redevelopment the well should be tested to determine the appropriate pumping rate to obtain stabilization of field indicator parameters with minimal drawdown in shortest amount of time. With this information field crews can then conduct purging and sampling in a more expeditious manner.

The mid-point of the saturated screen length (which should not exceed 10 feet) is used by convention as the location of the pump intake. However, significant chemical or permeability contrast(s) within the screen may require additional field work to determine the optimum vertical location(s) for the intake, and appropriate pumping rate(s) for purging and sampling more localized target zone(s). Primary flow zones (high(er) permeability and/or high(er) chemical concentrations) should be identified in wells with screen lengths longer than 10 feet, or in wells with open boreholes in bedrock. Targeting these zones for water sampling will help insure that the low stress procedure will not underestimate contaminant concentrations. The Sampling and Analysis Plan must provide clear instructions on how the pump intake depth(s) will be selected, and reason(s) for the depth(s) selected.

Stabilization of indicator field parameters is used to indicate that conditions are suitable for sampling to begin. Achievement of turbidity levels of less than 5 NTU and stable drawdowns of less than 0.3 feet, while desirable, are not mandatory. Sample collection may still take place provided the remaining criteria in this procedure are met. If after 4 hours of purging indicator field parameters have not stabilized, one of 3 optional courses of action may be taken: a) continue purging until stabilization is achieved, b) discontinue purging, do not collect any samples, and record in log book that stabilization could not be achieved (documentation must describe attempts to achieve stabilization) c) discontinue purging, collect samples and provide full explanation of attempts to achieve stabilization (note: there is a risk that the analytical data obtained, especially metals and strongly hydrophobic organic analytes, may not meet the sampling objectives).

Changes to this SOP should be proposed and discussed when the site Sampling and Analysis Plan is submitted for approval. Subsequent requests for modifications of an approved plan must include adequate technical justification for proposed changes. All changes and modifications must be approved before implementation in field.

## **II. EQUIPMENT**

### **A. Extraction device**

Adjustable rate, submersible pumps are preferred (for example, centrifugal or bladder pump constructed of stainless steel or

Teflon).

Adjustable rate, peristaltic pumps (suction) may be used with caution. Note that EPA guidance states: "Suction pumps are not recommended because they may cause degassing, pH modification, and loss of volatile compounds" (EPA/540/P-87/001, 1987, page 8.5-11).

The use of inertial pumps is discouraged. These devices frequently cause greater disturbance during purging and sampling and are less easily controlled than the pumps listed above. This can lead to sampling results that are adversely affected by purging and sampling operations, and a higher degree of data variability.

#### B. Tubing

Teflon or Teflon lined polyethylene tubing are preferred when sampling is to include VOCs, SVOCs, pesticides, PCBs and inorganics.

PVC, polypropylene or polyethylene tubing may be used when collecting samples for inorganics analyses. However, these materials should be used with caution when sampling for organics. If these materials are used, the equipment blank (which includes the tubing) data must show that these materials do not add contaminants to the sample.

Stainless steel tubing may be used when sampling for VOCs, SVOCs, pesticides, and PCBs. However, it should be used with caution when sampling for metals.

The use of 1/4 inch or 3/8 inch (inner diameter) tubing is preferred. This will help ensure the tubing remains liquid filled when operating at very low pumping rates.

Pharmaceutical grade (Pharmed) tubing should be used for the section around the rotor head of a peristaltic pump, to minimize gaseous diffusion.

C. Water level measuring device(s), capable of measuring to 0.01 foot accuracy (electronic "tape", pressure transducer). Recording pressure transducers, mounted above the pump, are especially helpful in tracking water levels during pumping operations, but their use must include check measurements with a water level "tape" at the start and end of each record.

D. Flow measurement supplies (e.g., graduated cylinder and stop watch).

E. Interface probe, if needed.

F. Power source (generator, nitrogen tank, etc.). If a gasoline generator is used, it must be located downwind and at least 30 feet from the well so that the exhaust fumes do not contaminate the samples.

G. Indicator field parameter monitoring instruments - pH, Eh, dissolved oxygen (DO), turbidity, specific conductance, and temperature. Use of a flow-through-cell is required when measuring all listed parameters, except turbidity. Standards to perform field calibration of instruments. Analytical methods are listed in 40 CFR 136, 40 CFR 141, and SW-846. For Eh measurements, follow manufacturer's instructions.

H. Decontamination supplies (for example, non-phosphate detergent, distilled/deionized water, isopropyl alcohol, etc.).

I. Logbook(s), and other forms (for example, well purging forms).

J. Sample Bottles.

K. Sample preservation supplies (as required by the analytical methods).

L. Sample tags or labels.

M. Well construction data, location map, field data from last sampling event.

N. Well keys.

O. Site specific Sample and Analysis Plan/Quality Assurance Project Plan.

P. PID or FID instrument (if appropriate) to detect VOCs for health and safety purposes, and provide qualitative field evaluations.

### **III. PRELIMINARY SITE ACTIVITIES**

Check well for security damage or evidence of tampering, record pertinent observations.

Lay out sheet of clean polyethylene for monitoring and sampling equipment.

Remove well cap and immediately measure VOCs at the rim of the well with a PID or FID instrument and record the reading in the field logbook.

If the well casing does not have a reference point (usually a V-cut or indelible mark in the well casing), make one. Describe its location and record the date of the mark in the logbook.

A synoptic water level measurement round should be performed (in the shortest possible time) before any purging and sampling activities begin. It is recommended that water level depth (to 0.01 ft.) and

total well depth (to 0.1 ft.) be measured the day before, in order to allow for re-settlement of any particulates in the water column. If measurement of total well depth is not made the day before, it should not be measured until after sampling of the well is complete. All measurements must be taken from the established referenced point. Care should be taken to minimize water column disturbance.

Check newly constructed wells for the presence of LNAPLs or DNAPLs before the initial sampling round. If none are encountered, subsequent check measurements with an interface probe are usually not needed unless analytical data or field head space information signal a worsening situation. Note: procedures for collection of LNAPL and DNAPL samples are not addressed in this SOP.

#### **IV. PURGING AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Sampling wells in order of increasing chemical concentrations (known or anticipated) is preferred.

##### **1. Install Pump**

Lower pump, safety cable, tubing and electrical lines slowly (to minimize disturbance) into the well to the midpoint of the zone to be sampled. The Sampling and Analysis Plan should specify the sampling depth, or provide criteria for selection of intake depth for each well (see Section I). If possible keep the pump intake at least two feet above the bottom of the well, to minimize mobilization of particulates present in the bottom of the well. Collection of turbid free water samples may be especially difficult if there is two feet or less of standing water in the well.

##### **2. Measure Water Level**

Before starting pump, measure water level. If recording pressure transducer is used-initialize starting condition.

##### **3. Purge Well**

###### **3a. Initial Low Stress Sampling Event**

Start the pump at its lowest speed setting and slowly increase the speed until discharge occurs. Check water level. Adjust pump speed until there is little or no water level drawdown (less than 0.3 feet). If the minimal drawdown that can be achieved exceeds 0.3 feet but remains stable, continue purging until indicator field parameters stabilize.

Monitor and record water level and pumping rate every three to five minutes (or as appropriate) during purging. Record any pumping rate adjustments (both time and flow rate). Pumping rates should, as needed, be reduced to the minimum capabilities of the pump (for example, 0.1 - 0.4 l/min) to ensure stabilization of indicator

parameters. Adjustments are best made in the first fifteen minutes of pumping in order to help minimize purging time. During pump start-up, drawdown may exceed the 0.3 feet target and then "recover" as pump flow adjustments are made. Purge volume calculations should utilize stabilized drawdown value, not the initial drawdown. Do not allow the water level to fall to the intake level (if the static water level is above the well screen, avoid lowering the water level into the screen). The final purge volume must be greater than the stabilized drawdown volume plus the extraction tubing volume.

Wells with low recharge rates may require the use of special pumps capable of attaining very low pumping rates (bladder, peristaltic), and/or the use of dedicated equipment. If the recharge rate of the well is lower than extraction rate capabilities of currently manufactured pumps and the well is essentially dewatered during purging, then the well should be sampled as soon as the water level has recovered sufficiently to collect the appropriate volume needed for all anticipated samples (ideally the intake should not be moved during this recovery period). Samples may then be collected even though the indicator field parameters have not stabilized.

### 3b. Subsequent Low Stress Sampling Events

After synoptic water level measurement round, check intake depth and drawdown information from previous sampling event(s) for each well. Duplicate, to the extent practicable, the intake depth and extraction rate (use final pump dial setting information) from previous event(s). Perform purging operations as above.

## 4. Monitor Indicator Field Parameters

During well purging, monitor indicator field parameters (turbidity, temperature, specific conductance, pH, Eh, DO) every three to five minutes (or less frequently, if appropriate). Note: during the early phase of purging emphasis should be put on minimizing and stabilizing pumping stress, and recording those adjustments. Purging is considered complete and sampling may begin when all the above indicator field parameters have stabilized. Stabilization is considered to be achieved when three consecutive readings, taken at three (3) to five (5) minute intervals, are within the following limits:

- turbidity (10% for values greater than 1 NTU),
- DO (10%),
- specific conductance (3%),
- temperature (3%),
- pH ( $\pm 0.1$  unit),
- ORP/Eh ( $\pm 10$  millivolts).

All measurements, except turbidity, must be obtained using a flow-through-cell. Transparent flow-through-cells are preferred, because they allow field personnel to watch for particulate build-up within the cell. This build-up may affect indicator field parameter values

measured within the cell and may also cause an underestimation of turbidity values measured after the cell. If the cell needs to be cleaned during purging operations, continue pumping and disconnect cell for cleaning, then reconnect after cleaning and continue monitoring activities.

The flow-through-cell must be designed in a way that prevents air bubble entrapment in the cell. When the pump is turned off or cycling on/off (when using a bladder pump), water in the cell must not drain out. Monitoring probes must be submerged in water at all times. If two flow-through-cells are used in series, the one containing the dissolved oxygen probe should come first (this parameter is most susceptible to error if air leaks into the system).

#### 5. Collect Water Samples

Water samples for laboratory analyses must be collected before water has passed through the flow-through-cell (use a by-pass assembly or disconnect cell to obtain sample).

VOC samples should be collected first and directly into pre-preserved sample containers. Fill all sample containers by allowing the pump discharge to flow gently down the inside of the container with minimal turbulence.

During purging and sampling, the tubing should remain filled with water so as to minimize possible changes in water chemistry upon contact with the atmosphere. It is recommended that 1/4 inch or 3/8 inch (inside diameter) tubing be used to help insure that the sample tubing remains water filled. If the pump tubing is not completely filled to the sampling point, use one of the following procedures to collect samples: (1) add clamp, connector (Teflon or stainless steel) or valve to constrict sampling end of tubing; (2) insert small diameter Teflon tubing into water filled portion of pump tubing allowing the end to protrude beyond the end of the pump tubing, collect sample from small diameter tubing; (3) collect non-VOC samples first, then increase flow rate slightly until the water completely fills the tubing, collect sample and record new drawdown, flow rate and new indicator field parameter values.

Add preservative, as required by analytical methods, to samples immediately after they are collected if the sample containers are not pre-preserved. Check analytical methods (e.g. EPA SW-846, water supply, etc.) for additional information on preservation. Check pH for all samples requiring pH adjustment to assure proper pH value. For VOC samples, this will require that a test sample be collected during purging to determine the amount of preservative that needs to be added to the sample containers prior to sampling.

If determination of filtered metal concentrations is a sampling objective, collect filtered water samples using the same low flow procedures. The use of an in-line filter is required, and the filter



size (0.45 um is commonly used) should be based on the sampling objective. Pre-rinse the filter with approximately 25 - 50 ml of ground water prior to sample collection. Preserve filtered water sample immediately. Note: filtered water samples are not an acceptable substitute for unfiltered samples when the monitoring objective is to obtain chemical concentrations of total mobile contaminants in ground water for human health risk calculations.

Label each sample as collected. Samples requiring cooling (volatile organics, cyanide, etc.) will be placed into a cooler with ice or refrigerant for delivery to the laboratory. Metal samples after acidification to a pH less than 2 do not need to be cooled.

#### 6. Post Sampling Activities

If recording pressure transducer is used, remeasure water level with tape.

After collection of the samples, the pump tubing may either be dedicated to the well for resampling (by hanging the tubing inside the well), decontaminated, or properly discarded.

Before securing the well, measure and record the well depth (to 0.1 ft.), if not measured the day before purging began. Note: measurement of total well depth is optional after the initial low stress sampling event. However, it is recommended if the well has a "silting" problem or if confirmation of well identity is needed.

Secure the well.

### **V. DECONTAMINATION**

Decontaminate sampling equipment prior to use in the first well and following sampling of each subsequent well. Pumps will not be removed between purging and sampling operations. The pump and tubing (including support cable and electrical wires which are in contact with the well) will be decontaminated by one of the procedures listed below.

#### Procedure 1

The decontaminating solutions can be pumped from either buckets or short PVC casing sections through the pump or the pump can be disassembled and flushed with the decontaminating solutions. It is recommended that detergent and isopropyl alcohol be used sparingly in the decontamination process and water flushing steps be extended to ensure that any sediment trapped in the pump is removed. The pump exterior and electrical wires must be rinsed with the decontaminating solutions, as well. The procedure is as follows:

Flush the equipment/pump with potable water.

Flush with non-phosphate detergent solution. If the solution is recycled, the solution must be changed periodically.

Flush with potable or distilled/deionized water to remove all of the detergent solution. If the water is recycled, the water must be changed periodically.

Flush with isopropyl alcohol (pesticide grade). If equipment blank data from the previous sampling event show that the level of contaminants is insignificant, then this step may be skipped.

Flush with distilled/deionized water. The final water rinse must not be recycled.

## Procedure 2

Steam clean the outside of the submersible pump.

Pump hot potable water from the steam cleaner through the inside of the pump. This can be accomplished by placing the pump inside a three or four inch diameter PVC pipe with end cap. Hot water from the steam cleaner jet will be directed inside the PVC pipe and the pump exterior will be cleaned. The hot water from the steam cleaner will then be pumped from the PVC pipe through the pump and collected into another container. Note: additives or solutions should not be added to the steam cleaner.

Pump non-phosphate detergent solution through the inside of the pump. If the solution is recycled, the solution must be changed periodically.

Pump potable water through the inside of the pump to remove all of the detergent solution. If the solution is recycled, the solution must be changed periodically.

Pump distilled/deionized water through the pump. The final water rinse must not be recycled.

## **VI. FIELD QUALITY CONTROL**

Quality control samples are required to verify that the sample collection and handling process has not compromised the quality of the ground water samples. All field quality control samples must be prepared the same as regular investigation samples with regard to sample volume, containers, and preservation. The following quality control samples shall be collected for each batch of samples (a batch may not exceed 20 samples). Trip blanks are required for the VOC samples at a frequency of one set per VOC sample cooler.

Field duplicate.

Matrix spike.

Matrix spike duplicate.

Equipment blank.

Trip blank (VOCs).

Temperature blank (one per sample cooler).

Equipment blank shall include the pump and the pump's tubing. If tubing is dedicated to the well, the equipment blank will only include the pump in subsequent sampling rounds.

Collect samples in order from wells with lowest contaminant concentration to highest concentration. Collect equipment blanks after sampling from contaminated wells and not after background wells.

Field duplicates are collected to determine precision of sampling procedure. For this procedure, collect duplicate for each analyte group in consecutive order (VOC original, VOC duplicate, SVOC original, SVOC duplicate, etc.).

If split samples are to be collected, collect split for each analyte group in consecutive order (VOC original, VOC split, etc.). Split sample should be as identical as possible to original sample.

All monitoring instrumentation shall be operated in accordance with EPA analytical methods and manufacturer's operating instructions. EPA analytical methods are listed in 40 CFR 136, 40 CFR 141, and SW-846 with exception of Eh, for which the manufacturer's instructions are to be followed. Instruments shall be calibrated at the beginning of each day. If a measurement falls outside the calibration range, the instrument should be re-calibrated so that all measurements fall within the calibration range. At the end of each day, check calibration to verify that instruments remained in calibration. Temperature measuring equipment, thermometers and thermistors, need not be calibrated to the above frequency. They should be checked for accuracy prior to field use according to EPA Methods and the manufacturer's instructions.

## **VII. FIELD LOGBOOK**

A field log shall be kept to document all ground water field monitoring activities (see attached example matrix), and record all of the following:

Well identification.

Well depth, and measurement technique.

Static water level depth, date, time and measurement technique.

Presence and thickness of immiscible liquid (NAPL) layers and

detection method.

Pumping rate, drawdown, indicator parameters values, and clock time, at the appropriate time intervals; calculated or measured total volume pumped.

Well sampling sequence and time of each sample collection.

Types of sample bottles used and sample identification numbers.

Preservatives used.

Parameters requested for analysis.

Field observations during sampling event.

Name of sample collector(s).

Weather conditions.

QA/QC data for field instruments.

Any problems encountered should be highlighted.

Description of all sampling equipment used, including trade names, model number, diameters, material composition, etc.

#### **VIII. DATA REPORT**

Data reports are to include laboratory analytical results, QA/QC information, and whatever field logbook information is needed to allow for a full evaluation of data useability.

