

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act Relating to Geothermal Heat Exchange Wells

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 32 MRSA §4700-E, sub-§3-C is enacted to read:

3-C. Geothermal heat exchange well. "Geothermal heat exchange well" means a hole drilled, driven or bored into the earth for the purpose of using the heat exchange capacity of the earth for heating and cooling.

Sec. 2. 32 MRSA §4700-E, sub-§3-D is enacted to read:

3-D. Geothermal heat exchange well driller. "Geothermal heat exchange well driller" means a person, firm or corporation engaged in the work of drilling, driving or boring geothermal heat exchange wells.

Sec. 3. 32 MRSA §4700-E, sub-§11, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §2, is amended to read:

11. Well drilling company. "Well drilling company" means a person, firm, partnership or corporation that owns or otherwise operates any mechanical equipment used to drill, drive or bore water wells or geothermal heat exchange wells.

Sec. 4. 32 MRSA §4700-G, sub-§1, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §3, is further amended to read:

1. Establishment of commission. The Maine Water Well Commission, as authorized by Title 5, chapter 379, is established to carry out the provisions of this chapter. The purpose of the commission is to provide the public with the highest quality drinking water possible by ensuring that water wells and geothermal heat exchange wells are drilled, constructed, altered or abandoned in a manner that protects groundwater from contamination.

Sec. 5. 32 MRSA §4700-G, sub-§2, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §4 and PL 2003, c. 689, Pt. B, §6, is further amended to read:

2. Membership. The commission consists of the ~~Director~~director of the ~~Division~~division of ~~Health Engineering~~environmental health within the Department of Health and Human Services or the director's designee; the Director of the Bureau of Geology and Natural Areas within the Department of Conservation or the director's designee; the Commissioner of Transportation or the commissioner's designee; and 4 public members, 3 of whom must be well drillers.

Sec. 6. 32 MRSA §4700-H, sub-§1-A, as enacted by PL 1993, c. 25, §8 and affected by §15, is amended to read:

1-A. Administer examinations. The commission shall develop and administer all examinations required by section 4700-I, subsection 4. All examinations must be written examinations and must test an applicant's knowledge of the principles of water well drilling, abandonment of water wells and the installation of water well pumps. With respect to geothermal heat exchange well drillers, all examinations must be in writing and test an applicant's knowledge of the principles of geothermal heat exchange wells.

Sec. 7. 32 MRSA §4700-H, sub-§2, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §7, is further amended to read:

2. Licensing. The commission shall license well drillers, well drilling companies, pump installers and pump installation companies and may initiate action for the revocation or suspension of such licenses. The commission shall license geothermal heat exchange well drillers.

Sec. 8. 32 MRSA §4700-H, sub-§4, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §8, is further amended to read:

4. Revocation and suspension of license. If the commission determines a violation of this chapter, the well driller and pump installer code of performance or other laws and rules in effect, including the water well information laws, Title 12, section 550-B, has occurred, the commission shall notify the responsible water well driller, geothermal heat exchange well driller, well drilling company, pump installer or pump installation company by certified or registered mail of the violation. The commission may order the responsible party or parties to correct, within 48 hours of notification, any violation it determines to be a significant threat to public health, including, but not limited to, potential contamination by pathogenic organisms. The commission may order that all other violations be corrected within a period of 60 days following receipt of notification. If the violation is not corrected within 60 days, or within 48 hours for significant threats to public health, the commission may revoke or suspend the license of the responsible party or parties. A licensee who receives a written notice of a violation or of a revocation or suspension of a license under this subsection may request a hearing before the commission. The commission shall conduct such hearings and issue its decision within 30 days of the request. A decision of the commission under this subsection is a final agency action. The commission shall adopt rules governing criteria for license reinstatement. Rules adopted by the commission pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter H-A2-A.

Sec. 9. 32 MRSA §4700-H, sub-§5, as amended by PL 1993, c. 25, §9 and affected by §15, is further amended to read:

5. Adopt code of performance. The commission shall adopt rules establishing a minimum code of performance for well drillers ~~and~~, pump installers and geothermal heat exchange well drillers. The code of performance must set forth appropriate minimum standards of professional conduct for well drillers ~~and~~, pump installers and geothermal heat exchange well drillers.

Sec. 10. 32 MRSA §4700-I, sub-§2, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §10, is further amended to read:

2. Licensure. Except as provided in subsection 2-A, an applicant for licensure shall submit to the commission, on a form provided by the commission, a written application for licensure containing such information as the commission requires. A person who holds a valid license as provided for in this section must be in the charge of a licensed well drilling company or pump installation company in order to actively practice well drilling or pump installation, repair or replacement. A company license is valid only while the company employs at least one licensed master well driller for a well drilling company or one master pump installer for a pump installation company. The commission shall license an applicant for well driller licensure as either a master well driller or a journeyman well driller and applicants for pump installer licensure as either a master pump installer or a journeyman pump installer, based on the following criteria.

A. A master well driller must have a minimum of 3 years experience in well drilling and have worked an average of 1,000 hours per year as a journeyman well driller for each of those years.

B. A journeyman well driller must have at least one year experience in well drilling and have worked at least 1,000 hours during that year as an apprentice well driller.

C. A master pump installer must have a minimum of 3 years experience as a pump installer and have worked at least 350 hours as a pump installer during each of those years.

E. A journeyman pump installer must have at least one year experience in pump installing and have worked at least 350 hours during that year as an apprentice pump installer.

F. A well drilling company must be issued a license upon presentation to the commission of a valid master well driller license issued to and held by the owner or an employee of the firm, partnership or corporation.

G. A pump installation company must be issued a license upon presentation to the commission of a valid master pump installer license issued to and held by the owner or an employee of the firm, partnership or corporation.

The commission shall license a well driller or pump installer applicant who is not eligible for licensure under paragraphs A to E as an apprentice.

Sec. 11. 32 MRSA §4700-I, sub-§2-A is enacted to read:

2-A. Geothermal heat exchange well drillers; licensure. The commission shall adopt rules providing for the appropriate minimum standards of training, education and experience for geothermal heat exchange well drillers, who are not eligible for licensure under subsection 2. Rules adopted pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules pursuant to Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A. The commission may adopt by rule national or other technical standards, in whole or in part, that it considers necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter. The commission shall consult with appropriate departments and agencies, including the Department of Environmental Protection, during the rule-making process.

Sec. 12. 32 MRSA §4700-L, sub-§1, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §13, is amended to read:

1. Fine. Any person, company, firm, partnership or corporation who installs, alters, repairs or replaces a water well, geothermal heat exchange well or pump system without being licensed as provided in this chapter or in violation of the code of performance adopted by the Maine Water Well Commission pursuant to section 4700-A, subsection 5, except for an apprentice well driller or an apprentice pump installer as set forth in this chapter, or any person, firm, partnership or corporation who procures a license as provided in this chapter wrongfully or by fraud commits a civil violation punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000.

Sec. 13. 32 MRSA §4700-L, sub-§3, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §13, is amended to read:

3. Exclusion. This chapter does not prevent a person from making water well, geothermal heat exchange well or pump system installations, alterations, repairs or replacements in a single-family residence occupied by that person or to be occupied by that person as a bona fide personal abode, ~~providing as long as~~ the installation, ~~alternationalteration~~, repair or replacement conforms to the standards set forth in this chapter and any rules adopted by the commission or the department.

Sec. 14. 32 MRSA §4700-M, as amended by PL 2001, c. 209, Pt. B, §13, is further amended to read:

§ 4700-M. Reciprocity

The commission may issue a license without examination, in a comparable classification, to any person who holds a registration or license in any state, territory or possession of the United States or any country, if the commission determines that the requirements for registration or licensure of well drillers, geothermal heat exchange well drillers or pump installers under which the person's registration or license was issued do not conflict with this chapter or the code of performance adopted by the commission under this chapter.

SUMMARY

Geothermal heat exchange systems for the purposes of residential, commercial and institutional heating sources use particular types of geothermal heat exchange wells. This bill ensures that the boreholes for geothermal heat exchange wells are drilled appropriately and that groundwater quality and drinking water quality are protected. It provides the Maine Water Well Commission, which currently oversees well drillers, well drilling companies, pump installers and pump installation companies, with the oversight of geothermal heat exchange wells and geothermal heat exchange well drillers.