

Are You Protected under the Safe Drinking Water Act?

Celebrating 40 Years: Successes and Concerns

Background

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) celebrated its 40th anniversary in December 2014: the law was enacted by Congress in 1974, and was formally amended in 1986 and 1996. Now more than 170,000 public water supplies in the United States adhere to the requirements of SDWA. Unfortunately, in the US there are still those who are not familiar with SDWA and as a result they do not trust (or perhaps are not aware) of the fact that public water systems produce drinking water that is generally abundant and safe for consumption.

In fact, safe drinking water in the US is too often taken for granted and perceived as everyone's "right" yet in many parts of the world safe drinking water is in short supply. This includes parts of the US where drought conditions currently exist. The lack of clean water for drinking and sanitation continues to result in severe public health crises that otherwise could be averted.

Nearly all States and Indian Tribes have the right to govern their own public water supplies if they:

- enforce the National Primary Drinking Water Standards
- establish a drinking water laboratory certification program
- maintain a "principal" laboratory that is certified by the Environmental Protection Agency to analyze drinking water

State Laboratory Role

State and municipal drinking water programs monitor the concentration of regulated contaminants listed in the Standards (including 90 chemical, microbiological, radiological physical contaminants). State public health or environmental laboratories typically serve as the principal laboratories by providing analytical laboratory services to public water systems for these primary contaminants. All residents in the US served by a public water system are provided an annual Consumer Confidence Report with a summary of these results for the water in their community.

The US EPA consistently evaluates additional drinking water contaminants that may be regulated based on potential health effects and occurrence. State environmental & public health laboratories provide support to this process (through the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Program). The government laboratory role includes monitoring these unregulated contaminants using new methods to help EPA determine if they should be added to the Standards.

Occasionally public water supplies can experience contamination from unregulated contaminants that result in "do not use" orders or advisories, as happened in 2014 after the chemical leak into the Elk River in West Virginia, and after the threat of toxins released by blue green bacteria blooms in Lake Erie affected the entire water supply for the city of Toledo, OH. State environmental and public health laboratories prepare for and are often called upon in such emergency situations.

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National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (IP)
Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology and Laboratory Services (OSELS)
National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STDs and TB Prevention (PS)
National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-borne, and Enteric Diseases (CK)
National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH)
Coordinating Office for Terrorism Preparedness and Emergency Response (CTPER)



Well Water is Not Protected under SDWA – What Can Well Owners Do?

Approximately 15% of Americans obtain their drinking water from private wells, but SDWA does not regulate this type of water. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists microbiological (Hepatitis A, *E. coli*, *Shigella*, etc.) and chemical (arsenic, selenium, nitrate, gasoline, etc.) contaminants associated with illness due to private well water exposure.

Well owners should have their water tested not only when they move into a home, but also periodically while living there (since weather, geology, and nearby chemical spills can lead to changes over time). The National Ground Water Association (NGWA) provides helpful links to state-by-state resources for well owners at www.wellowner.org. They include:

- List of authorities on drinking water quality by state
- List of laboratory certification programs by state
- How to find a reliable water well contractor by state

APHL strongly urges well owners to:

- Contact their state or local authority on water quality to request guidance for using their well as a source of drinking water.
- Learn what type of well you own, its location and its condition.
- Contact your state laboratory certification program or authority on water quality to request a list of certified laboratories that test well water for drinking.
- Use a certified laboratory to test your water quality before you drink the water and periodically thereafter.
- Learn about the Safe Drinking Water Act and how the Primary Drinking Water Standards serve as guidance for drinking water well owners.

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