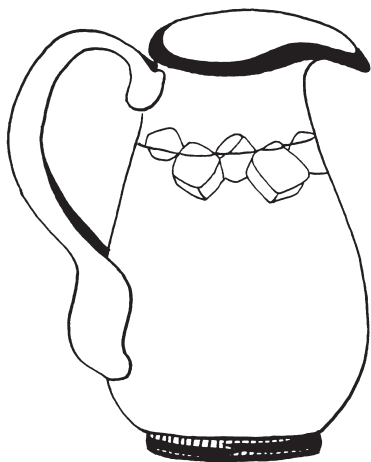


Drinking Water



Know your water supply

Take a moment to think about how water is used in your home. Whether it's for drinking, cooking, bathing, or doing laundry, an abundant supply of clean water is an important part of a healthy home.

Knowing where your water comes from and what the most common water supply problems are in your area can help you make sure that the water coming out of your tap is safe, no matter how you use it.

Water quality testing

If you own a private well, it is your responsibility to be sure your water supply is safe. Routine testing and well maintenance will help you protect your water supply.

Healthy home tips for private well owners

- ✓ Take the time to learn about your water supply. The depth of your well, the length of its casing, the type of soil or bedrock in your area, and regional land-use information are important predictors of the quality of your water supply.
- ✓ Find out when your well was last tested, what tests were run, and the results of the tests. Keep records of any tests or repairs that you make. This information will help you or a future owner decide when it's time to do more testing.
- ✓ Test at least once a year for bacteria. Several public and private laboratories in Wisconsin can conduct these tests. Check the yellow pages in your phone book to find a lab near you.
- ✓ Test for nitrate. This is especially important if there is a pregnant woman or infant in your home. Nitrate can enter groundwater from fertilizer use, barnyard runoff, and septic system leachate. A high nitrate level may indicate the presence of other contaminants such as bacteria or farm chemicals.
- ✓ Consider testing for other contaminants. Talk to a water supply expert at your regional Department of Natural Resources (DNR) office to find out whether natural contaminants such as arsenic or radon are common in your area. If your well is located near an old landfill or gasoline station, or if there has ever been a buried fuel tank on your property, you should consider testing your water for

volatile organic chemicals (VOCs). If your well is located near an orchard or farm field, you may want to have it tested for pesticide residues.

- ✓ Correct/eliminate all cross-connections.
- ✓ Have your water tested if you notice a change in its taste, odor, or appearance. Some tests are expensive and may require assistance from a water supply expert. Contact your well driller, regional DNR office, or your local health agency for assistance.
- ✓ Take action if harmful bacteria or chemicals are detected in your water. Find the source of the problem, make the necessary repairs to your well, and test your water again to be sure the problem was corrected. If bacteria or chemicals continue to be present, contact a water supply expert. He or she can offer advice on how you can obtain a safe drinking water supply. Possible solutions include increasing the depth of your well, adding more casing, installing a new well in a different location, or abandoning your well and connecting to a community supply.
- ✓ Keep toxic chemicals, septic effluent, and animal waste away from your well. Dispose of pesticides, motor oil, paints, and solvents properly. Don't put these chemicals into your septic system. Limit your use of lawn and garden pesticides and fertilizers which often find their way into ground water. Keep the area around your well cap clear.
- ✓ Install backflow devices on outdoor faucets. These devices will prevent water from a garden hose from flowing backwards into your drinking water system.
- ✓ Hire a licensed plumber for major repairs or modifications to your home's plumbing system.
- ✓ Conserve water. Clean water is a precious commodity. Don't waste it. Use water-efficient faucets, toilets, and showerheads, and repair plumbing leaks promptly.

Common water supply problems

Bacteria & Viruses. The most common pollutants found in private wells are coliform bacteria. Detection of these organisms suggests that human or animal wastes have entered your water supply. While most bacteria won't make you sick, they indicate the possible presence of disease-causing bacteria, viruses, or parasites.

Chemicals. A variety of harmful chemicals such as gasoline, solvents, and pesticides can enter groundwater as a result of their use and disposal. Naturally occurring substances such as arsenic, manganese, iron, and radon can also affect the quality of your drinking water.

Public water supplies are tested for more than 100 different contaminants. If you use water from a public utility you can contact their office to get information about the quality of your drinking water.

Groundwater is contained in soil and underground rock formations. All private wells and many public water supplies use groundwater as a water source.

Several communities use surface water that is drawn from nearby lakes. Lake Winnebago, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior are all used for this purpose.

Healthy home tips for public water consumers

- ✓ Find out where your water comes from and who provides it. Contact your water utility if you have questions about your water supply.
- ✓ Protect your community's water supply. Follow any water-use advisories that are issued by your water supplier. Dispose of pesticides, motor oil, and other toxic chemicals properly. Consider reducing your use of lawn and garden pesticides and fertilizers since these chemicals often find their way into drinking water supplies.
- ✓ Be aware of changes in your water supply. A change in the taste, odor, or appearance of your water may indicate a serious water quality problem. Call your water utility if you notice any of these changes.

✓ Install backflow devices on all outdoor faucets. These devices will prevent water from a garden hose from flowing backwards into your drinking water system.

✓ Hire a licensed plumber whenever you modify or expand your plumbing system.

✓ Conserve water. Clean water is a precious commodity. Don't waste it. Use water-efficient faucets, toilets, and showerheads, and correct plumbing leaks promptly.

