

HOME WATER SAFETY

Keeping Your Home Water Supply Safe

By Chris Mechenich and Elaine Andrews

This fact sheet is part of a series designed to help you determine the quality of your home drinking water, and to show you techniques available for improving it. To make the best use of these publications, include them in a household file containing well information and water test results.

Other fact sheets in the series are:

G3558-2 Evaluating the Condition of Your Private Water Supply

G3558-3 Evaluating the Condition of Your Public Water Supply

G3558-4 Interpreting Drinking Water Test Results

G3558-5 Choosing a Water Treatment Device.

Extension bulletin G3399 *Maintaining Your Home Well Water System*, can be used with these publications.

This series was developed by the University of Wisconsin-Extension in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations.

SAFE DRINKING WATER is a resource we often take for granted, yet it is essential to our families' health as well as the growth and prosperity of our communities. This is the first in a series of fact sheets written to help you determine whether or not your water supply is safe, and what steps you might need to take to maintain or improve its safety.

The chart inside leads you through the steps needed to ensure your water supply is safe. You will notice that your responsibilities are significantly different depending on whether you have a **public** or **private** source of water.

Public water supplies must meet water quality standards enforced by the United States Environmental Protection Agency through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Suppliers must periodically submit test results to the DNR.

Public water quality standards address health concerns but are only advisory for problems with water's taste, odor or appearance. Water quality problems can develop in your own home, even if water is safe at the source. If you are on a public water supply, there are actions you can take to improve the quality of water both in your home and the community.

Private well construction is regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Wisconsin also has a Groundwater Law (NR 140) which requires all state agencies to examine the activities they regulate to prevent groundwater contamination above certain levels. However, the quality of the water supplied by an individual well is not routinely monitored by any public agency. The water consumer must develop his or her own program of well maintenance and water quality testing, which should include planning and budgeting to correct problems.

When you are served by a public water supply, you pay a water bill and delegate some of the responsibility of safeguarding the water supply to your supplier. When you have a private water supply, that responsibility is very much your own. The fact sheets in this series will help you make good decisions about protecting and improving the quality of water in your home—no matter what its source.

WATER SOURCE

Private Well

1. Your annual responsibilities:

- *Test water (see G3558-2, G3558-4).*
 - ➔ If you have test results of concern, you may need further testing (see G3558-2).
- *Evaluate well location and construction (see G3558-2).*
 - ➔ If you have concerns about well location or construction, you may need further testing (see G3558-2).

2. After looking at the annual water test, doing additional tests (if needed), and conducting your annual evaluation of well location and construction, determine into which of these categories your well fits:

- *The well is properly located and constructed. Tests are all okay.*
 - ➔ Repeat the process again next year.
- *The well is properly located and constructed, but tests show problems.*
 - ➔ Choose from two options:
Use an alternate drinking water source (see G3558-2); OR
Install a water treatment device and use maintenance procedures (see G3558-5).
The next year, test the water again and re-evaluate well location and construction.
- *The well is improperly located or constructed.*
 - ➔ Repair or replace the well (see G3558-2). Repeat the testing and evaluation process the following year.
 - ➔ Eliminate potential contamination sources (see G3558-2).

WATER SOURCE

Public Supply

Your responsibilities:

- *Review water supplier test results and maintenance records if you have concerns (see G3558-3, G3558-4).*
 - ➔ If you identify concerns, discuss them with your regional Department of Natural Resources office, install a water treatment device (if advisable) and follow proper maintenance procedures (see G3558-5).
- *Test your water for lead if you have lead pipes or solder (see G3558-3, G3558-4).*
 - ➔ If your water contains lead, consider repairing or replacing plumbing (see G3558-3).
- *Test for iron or hardness if you are having problems with the taste, odor or appearance of your water (G3558-4).*
 - ➔ If there is a problem, install a water treatment device and follow proper maintenance procedures (G3558-5).

If all of the above test results are acceptable, your water quality is good. Support your community's efforts to protect its water supply.

Responsibilities of the water supplier:

- *Inspect and maintain water supply and treatment equipment, and periodically test the water. The Department of Natural Resources routinely inspects supplies and reviews results.*
 - ➔ If there are contaminants at unsafe levels, the supplier must treat the water or replace the water supply.

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