

Ground Water Awareness

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

Water is one of the world's most precious resources; we can't live without it. The United States alone uses 408 *billion* gallons of water each day and most of it is completely safe. However, between 2003 and 2004, nearly 3,000 Americans got sick from contaminated drinking water. Over half of these cases could be due to improperly treated or untreated ground water.

Each year, CDC recognizes National Ground Water Awareness Week. This observance highlights ground water as a valuable resource and emphasizes the importance of private well maintenance and water testing.

When rain falls, much of it is absorbed into the ground. Water that's not used by plants moves downward through pores and spaces in the rock until it reaches a dense layer of rock. The water trapped below the ground in the pores and spaces above the dense rock barrier is called ground water, and this is the water we get when we drill wells. Forty to forty-five percent of the U.S. population uses ground water as its drinking water supply.

All private wells use ground water. Some community or municipal water systems also use ground water. If you get your tap water from a community or municipal water system, you can request a Consumer Confidence Report from your local water utility company or from the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA's website, www.epa.gov. This report will tell you where your water comes from.

Diarrhea and vomiting are the most common illnesses related to drinking contaminated water. However, illness affecting the lungs, skin, and nervous system can also be related to contaminated drinking water. Certain contaminants, such as arsenic and radon, can occur naturally in the environment. Their concentration in ground water depends on the geology and composition of the surrounding rock. Bacteria, parasites, viruses, toxins, and other chemicals can also contaminate ground water. Often times, these can be the same pollutants that contaminate surface water. Because land is porous, contaminants from the surface can move through soil and water and end up in ground water.

If you own a private well, *you* are responsible for ensuring that the water is safe. The U.S. EPA has rules that protect public drinking water systems, but they do not protect privately-owned wells. Make sure your well is properly constructed, maintained, and tested. Have your well checked annually by a qualified well contractor for mechanical problems and cleanliness. Have the well water tested yearly for coliform bacteria, nitrates, and other potential contaminants of local concern. Keep proper clearances between the wellhead and sources of contamination. Avoid storing hazardous materials near the well, such as paint, fertilizer, pesticides, and motor oil. Large animals and their

manure should be kept away from the well. Additionally, make sure that any on-site septic systems are properly maintained and located at a safe distance from the well.

For more information on drinking water, contact your local health department or call the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791. Other resources for information include: the CDC website, www.cdc.gov; the EPA website, www.epa.gov; and the National Ground Water Association website, www.wellowner.org.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.