

Steps to Take

Here are the six basic steps you should take to maintain the safety of your drinking water.

1. Identify potential problem sources
2. Talk with local experts
3. Have your water tested annually and immediately if you notice a change in odor or taste of the water.
4. Have the test results interpreted and explained clearly.
5. Set a regular maintenance schedule for your well, do the scheduled maintenance and keep accurate, up-to-date records. For more information on frequency and type of maintenance needed for your well, please review Colorado State University Extension Protecting Your Well brochure which is available at your local extension office or at: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/crops/xcm179.pdf>
6. Remedy any problems



Testing Recommendations

Test your water every year for total coliform bacteria, nitrates, total dissolved solids, and pH levels. If you suspect other contaminants, test for them also. Local experts can tell you about possible impurities in your area. Homeowners may contact their local health department for information on getting their water tested. Before taking a sample, contact the lab for instructions and sampling bottles. Follow the instructions carefully so you will get correct results. Remember to test your water after replacing or repairing any piping, the pump, or the well itself.

Certified Drinking Water Testing Labs on the Western Slope:

Enviro-Chem Analytical
685 West Gunnison Avenue
Suite 108
Grand Junction, CO
970-242-6154

City of Gunnison Wastewater Treatment Plant
524 County Road 32
Gunnison, CO
970-641-8042

Mesa County Health Department
Regional Laboratory
510 29.5 Road
Grand Junction, CO
970-248-6999
<http://health.mesacounty.us/lab/template.aspx?id=3427>

For other Certified labs see bottom of this webpage:
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/environmental-laboratories-certification>

Water Testing by the CDPHE Laboratory: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/water-testing>
See the packages of tests available, or call (303) 692-3048.

For more information or to talk to a local person, contact: Montrose County Environmental Health 970-252-5067 or CSU Extension 970-641-7627.

Is Your Well "Well"?

Information for Private Well Owners



Ouray County Public Health Agency

302 2nd Street, PO Box 670
Ouray CO 81427
970-325-4670



Introduction

If your family gets drinking water from your own well, do you know if it is safe to drink? About 15 percent of Americans have a private source of drinking water, such as a well, cistern, or spring. Unlike public drinking water systems, the quality of private water supplies is not regulated by government agencies.

What is Ground Water?

Ground water is water under the earth's surface, resulting from rain and melting snow soaking into the ground. Ground water quality varies and may contain some natural impurities or contaminants, even with no human activity or pollution. Water moving through underground rocks and soils may pick up magnesium, calcium and chlorides. Some ground water naturally contains dissolved elements such as arsenic, boron, selenium, or radon, a gas formed by the natural breakdown of radioactive uranium in soil. Whether these natural contaminants result in health problems depends on the amount of the substance present.

What Human Activities Can Pollute Ground Water?

Septic systems and the handling of human and animal waste: Bacteria and nitrates are pollutants found in human and animal wastes. Septic systems and animal manures must be carefully managed to prevent pollution.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs): On these farms thousands of animals are raised in a small space. Animal waste/manure can threaten water supplies. Strict and careful manure management is needed to prevent problems.

Mining and construction: These activities can release large quantities of heavy metals into groundwater. Some older fruit orchards may contain high levels of arsenic, once used as a pesticide.

Oil or gas drilling or development: Drilling can change the distribution of ground water and chemicals may be used to extract oil and gas from the earth.

Fertilizers and Pesticides: Farmers use fertilizers and pesticides to promote growth and reduce insect damage. These products are also used on golf courses and suburban lawns and gardens.

Industrial Products and Wastes: Many harmful chemicals are used in factories, industrial plants, and small businesses such as gas stations and dry cleaners.

Household Wastes: Improper disposal of many common products can pollute groundwater. These include cleaning solvents, used motor oil, paints, and paint thinners.

Should I Be Concerned?

Individual well owners have primary responsibility for the safety of the water drawn from their wells and should therefore educate themselves. Contact your local health department for information about water testing and local groundwater conditions. Local health departments may also provide some insight on the placement and construction of new wells to meet state and local regulations. But remember, the final responsibility for constructing your well correctly, protecting it from pollution, and maintaining it falls on you, the well owner.

How Much Risk Can I Expect?

Ask local experts the following questions:

- What distance should my well be from a septic system?
- How far should it be from animal feedlots or manure spreading?
- What are the types of soil and underlying rocks? Does water flow easily or collect on the surface?
- How deep must a well be to avoid seasonal changes in ground water supply?
- What activities (farming, mining, industry) might affect my well?
- What is the age of my well, its pump, and other parts?
- Is my distribution system protected from cross connections and backflow?