



Drinking Water Fact Kit

Water Testing Tips

NSF International is an independent, not-for-profit public health organization that writes public health standards for food, water and consumer products. NSF also tests and certifies products to make sure they meet these standards. NSF has a 65-year history of protecting public health, safety and environment worldwide and is a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Food and Water Safety and Indoor Environment. NSF developed the American national public health standards for materials and products coming into contact with drinking water and all chemicals used to treat drinking water. NSF has also developed seven standards for drinking water treatment products, such as filters, faucet mounts and under sink varieties.

Many consumers assume that if their water looks, tastes, and smells okay that it's safe to drink. Unfortunately, few contaminants can actually be detected by our senses, so water testing may be needed. The four main contaminant categories are as follows:

Microbiological Contaminants

Most health departments require a total coliform test to determine if bacteria is present in a well when it is first put into service or when the property changes ownership. Two additional forms of potential microbiological contamination include parasites and viruses, although these are most frequently found in surface water supplies.

Inorganic Contaminants

This category includes metals and minerals that can affect either the safety or taste of well water. They can be naturally occurring or may result from manmade contamination. Some common inorganics found in well water include:

- Nitrates/Nitrites (fertilizers, onsite septic systems)
- Arsenic (naturally occurring/manmade contamination)
- Sodium (naturally occurring/some treatment systems)

Chemicals

Chemicals can also leach into well water supplies from the application of pesticides, runoff from agricultural and industrial operations, or from gasoline storage tanks.

- Volatile Organic Chemicals or VOCs (pesticides, etc.)
- MTBE (gasoline additive)

Radiological

The fourth type of contaminant sometime found in private wells would be radiological in nature, such as:

- Radon (gas; also can be found in indoor air)
- Radium 226/228 (from decaying uranium deposits)

To determine if any of these contaminants are present in your well water supply, you may want to have your water tested. Local health departments can usually provide a list of state-certified drinking water laboratories to whom a water sample can be sent. If any contaminants are detected at levels that exceed EPA or state guidelines for public drinking water supplies, consider installing a home water treatment system or using certified bottled water for drinking.

To view a list of common contaminants that can be found in public and private drinking water supplies, visit www.nsf.org/consumer/drinking_water/dw_contaminant_guide.asp.

To find NSF certified products, visit www.nsf.org/certified/consumer/listings_main.asp.



Have your water tested to determine if any contaminants are present in your drinking water supply.