



**COMMUNITY
WATER CENTER**
EL CENTRO COMUNITARIO
POR EL AGUA



What if I have a private well?

If you are served by your own private well, then you are solely responsible for the quality of that water. There are no requirements or regulations regarding testing, quality, or reporting of private wells under the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts. However, most county ordinances set basic construction permit requirements before a well can be drilled, and some require testing of private wells before a title can change hands on a residential property. Overall, there is virtually no oversight of private wells in California. All maintenance and repairs are the responsibility of the landowner, and to get water quality information you will need to do your own water testing.

Landlords & Tenants with Private Wells

If you own a well that provides water to others, such as tenants or neighboring homes, it is important to regularly test your well to make sure that it is safe. If you find out that bacteria are present or a contaminant is over a maximum contaminant level (MCL), you should immediately notify everyone using your well and look for ways to solve the problem, such as disinfecting the well or installing a treatment device. If you have a treatment device on the well or in a home, make sure that the filter is changed regularly and that it is properly installed and maintained; otherwise it can be more dangerous than not having one at all. Loan and grant assistance programs may be available to help rehabilitate private wells, septic systems, and other housing issues, particularly if you are low-income and over 62 years old or are a current or retired farm worker. Contact Self Help Enterprises at (559) 651-1000 or www.selfhelpenterprises.org for more information.

If you are a tenant, ask your landlord for the most recent water testing reports. If you have a filter, find out when the last maintenance took place. You have rights under state housing law to a safe and habitable environment and should contact a legal aid office or other housing attorney for more information.

You can also call your County Environmental Health Department or the Department of Public Health's (DPH) Drinking Water Program to find out which contaminants have been found in wells in your area.

This information was originally published in the Community Water Center's
Guide to Community Drinking Water Advocacy.
available at: www.communitywatercenter.org

Tips for Private Well Owners

Before using your well, you should test for all common chemical and biological contaminants. For a full list of all contaminants regulated under the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/CERTLIC/DRINKINGWATER/Pages/Chemicalcontaminants.aspx>.

To find a certified laboratory in your area, look at the list at www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/labs/Pages/ELAP.aspx or contact the Department of Public Health (DPH) at (510) 620-3155. Usually laboratories provide their own containers and procedures and some send technicians to take samples at your home.

Every year, and especially before you have an infant in the house, you should test for nitrate and bacteria. These tests are generally available from your County Environmental Health Department and typically cost approximately \$20.

Although we recommend testing for all contaminants at least once, sampling for the full list of regulated contaminants can be expensive for low-income homeowners. Here is a guide developed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help you consider what contaminants to prioritize for testing:

Conditions or Nearby Activities:	Test for:
Recurring gastro-intestinal illness	Coliform bacteria
Household plumbing contains lead	pH, lead, copper
Radon in indoor air or region is radon rich	Radon
Corrosion of pipes, plumbing corrosion	pH, lead
Nearby areas of intensive agriculture	Nitrate, pesticides, coliform bacteria
Coal or other mining operations nearby	Metals, pH, corrosion
Gas drilling operations nearby	Chloride, sodium, barium, strontium
Dump, junkyard, landfill, factory, gas station, or dry-cleaning operation nearby	Volatile organic chemicals, total dissolved solids, pH, sulfate, chloride, metals
Odor of gasoline or fuel oil, and near gas station or buried fuel tanks	Volatile organic chemicals
Objectionable taste or smell	Hydrogen sulfide, corrosion, metals
Stained plumbing fixtures, laundry	Iron, copper, manganese
Scaly residues, soaps don't lather	Hardness
Salty taste and seawater, or a heavily salted roadway nearby	Chloride, total dissolved solids, sodium
Rapid wear of water treatment equipment	pH, corrosion
Water softener needed to treat hardness	Manganese, iron
Water appears cloudy, frothy, or colored	Color, detergents



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