

Water Testing

Over ninety percent of water systems in the United States meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) drinking water standards, but did you know that every time you turn on your faucet more than just water comes out? Water also contains many naturally occurring components and contaminants. How do you know what water is okay to drink and what is not?

The EPA's drinking water standards are composed of two categories:

- National Primary Drinking Water Regulations – legally-enforceable, and protects the water quality of public water systems by limiting the levels of specific contaminants.
- National Secondary Drinking Water Regulations – non-enforceable, and protects from contaminants in drinking water that may cause cosmetic or aesthetic effects.

If your water supply is from a public source, then it is up to your water utilities company to ensure that these standards are met. Information about your water quality may be obtained from your local health department or by requesting a copy of the water utilities Municipal Drinking Water Contaminant Analysis Report; however, they are required to send this to you, as their customer, annually.

You may not need to test your water unless the taste, odor or appearance changes and if these changes occur, you should contact your water utilities company immediately.

If you get your water from your own well, then you should test your water at least once every year for coliform bacteria and nitrates. Lead should also be tested for if your house is old and contains iron or copper pipes, fittings, or plumbing fixtures. Laboratories also can test for other contaminants but it is usually unnecessary unless they are believed to be present.

The do-it-yourself water testing kits are not as accurate as laboratory analyses and do not always detect low levels of contaminants.

To learn more about the contents of your water, follow the steps to water quality testing.

Steps to water quality testing:

- Inspect your water for an unusual taste, color or odor. Also look to see if it contains sediment, or stains clothes, dishes, fixtures or sidewalks.
- Contact your county Extension agent or county health department to find out what contaminants might be likely for your well or in your area. They can also give you contact information of water quality testing laboratories in your area.
- Contact a laboratory and request instructions on what container to use and how to properly collect and transport a water sample.

Your county Extension agent, your county health department or the laboratory itself can help you interpret the results of your lab report and determine if your water should be treated. They will also help you determine the appropriate treatment methods.

For more information about water testing and what is in your water, visit <http://tcebookstore.org> and download "What's in My Water?" and "Solving Water Quality Problems in the Home." To view the U.S. EPA water quality standards, visit <http://www.epa.gov>.

Remember: what you do affects the quality and quantity of the water you drink and use. By keeping that in mind, you are helping protect water resources now and in the future. Help save Texas water and make every drop count.

