

**Thirsty?**  
**Be sure your drinking water is clean and safe**  
*May 2005*

Do you have concerns about the safety of the water you and your family drink? Do you wonder where it comes from or how it's treated to make sure it's clean and safe?

While many of us take for granted that our drinking water is safe, nearly everyone wonders about it from time to time whether our water comes from a public water system, a private water system or a bottle.

National Drinking Water Week, celebrated during the first week of May, is the perfect time to find out more about your drinking water and how you can help protect it.

Ohio EPA and community water systems around the state are your partners in that effort by working hard to make important information available about the sources and quality of the water you drink. Ohio EPA's Division of Drinking and Ground Waters, which regulates all public water systems in the state, receives a tremendous amount of data from water systems every month. Part of their job is to review that information and look for signs of problems, especially violations.

### **Drinking Water Advisories Now Available Online**

To help celebrate National Drinking Water Week, Ohio EPA is unveiling a new Web page that provides timely updates about public water systems where problems lead to drinking water advisories. Advisories are issued by water systems for a number of reasons when a legitimate concern about the safety of the water supply is present. They can result from exceeding the acceptable limits for microbiological or chemical contaminants, violations of limits for certain chemicals used in treating the water or other situations such as spills, floods, droughts or security issues.

**Mike Baker**, Ohio EPA's drinking water chief, said, "This Web site provides current, detailed information for drinking water advisories at public water systems throughout the state."

Baker added, "People want to know, and have a right to know, about the quality of water they are receiving from a public water system. This is especially true when there are problems. This Web site is an additional tool to ensure the public has rapid, easy access to water quality information."

The drinking water advisory page may be accessed at <http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ddagw/Advisories/Advisories.htm>.

Even though drinking water advisories occur from time to time, it's important to remember that only a relatively small number of water systems have situations that warrant them. In 2003, Ohio had more than 5,500 public water systems and 93 percent of them were in compliance with the maximum contaminant levels for total coliform bacteria, the main indicator for bacteriological safety. In addition, 99.5 percent of all public water systems met all chemical standards.

### **The Lowdown on *Your* Drinking Water**

If you are one of the 10 million people in Ohio who drink water from a community water system every day, there is another great source of information available to you. Once a year, every community water system delivers a Consumer Confidence Report to its customers. Each report contains information on a community's drinking water, including the source of the water, contaminants found in it, the likely sources of those contaminants, health effects of contaminants and how consumers can get involved in protecting drinking water.

The Consumer Confidence Report for your system is often included with your water bill around this time of year. The reports have to be delivered by July 1 each year and many larger water systems include it with the water bill – so don't automatically throw away the "filler" in the envelope; it may contain valuable information. If you miss it in the mail, you can contact your water system for a copy or you may be able to find it posted on your water system's Web page.

What good is all this information? Most consumers should be reassured that their drinking water is safe. However, this information allows consumers, especially those who care for small children or have particular health concerns, to make informed choices about using home treatment devices or an alternative source of drinking water, such as bottled water. (See a related article about considerations for selecting and maintaining home treatment systems at [http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ddagw/Documents/Revised\\_home\\_treatment\\_article.pdf](http://www.epa.state.oh.us/ddagw/Documents/Revised_home_treatment_article.pdf).)

## **Your Choices *Do* Make a Difference**

Besides making choices about what water you drink, you will find that there are other choices you make that can have a direct effect on the quality of drinking water sources. Whatever you can do to reduce the amount of pollutants running off your yard or property can help to protect a drinking water source – your own or someone else's. And, the cleaner the source water, the less the water system – and its customers – have to pay to treat the water.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Minimize the use of pesticides and fertilizers on your yard or property.
- Make sure you use and dispose of cleaning products, paints and other products containing harmful materials properly.
- Don't over water your yard and garden. The water that runs off may contain fertilizers, pesticides, soil and debris.
- Make sure your septic system is working properly.
- Sweep your street. If you live in an area with curbs and storm drains, it will reduce the amount of pollutants, debris and dead vegetation entering waterways.

To get involved at the community level, contact your public water system superintendent and ask whether a drinking water source protection plan is in place or being developed. If not, you may want to offer your assistance in organizing a protection team in your community. Much of the effort involved is organizational, so anyone with energy and organizational skills could be a valuable resource.

Preventing pollution is critical to protecting drinking water from contamination and reducing the need for costly treatment. Your action and community involvement are key to providing a safe drinking water supply.