



What's in the drinking water?

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Abstract

Safe, clean, accessible, and affordable drinking water is a human right in California. The primary source of drinking water in the Coachella Valley is groundwater, which is drawn from underground aquifers through wells. Groundwater can contain contaminants, some natural and some from human activities like agriculture. Common drinking water contaminants in Coachella Valley include arsenic, fluoride, uranium, chromium, nitrate, and perchlorate. When people consume water with high levels of these contaminants, a person may develop serious health problems. Children, pregnant people, and the elderly are the most vulnerable to these contaminants. Here, we provide information on where drinking water comes from, the health effects of common drinking water contaminants found in Coachella Valley, how to test tap water, and helpful community resources to learn how to treat your water or find help from local organizations.

Introduction

The Coachella Valley is in a hot, arid region with very low annual rainfall. Because of the lack of rain in the area, most residents' primary source of drinking water is groundwater. Tap water in the Salton Sea region typically comes from one of three sources: a public water system, a state small water system, or a private domestic well. Public water systems supply treated piped water for everyday use. All public water systems must follow state and federal laws enacted by the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974.

In contrast, private wells are owned and managed by private landowners. Monitoring and

treating water that comes out of a private well is the sole responsibility of the well owner; federal and state drinking water regulations do not regulate the quality of the water. State small water systems are wells that serve 4 to 14 connections or homes. For example, many small mobile home parks in the Salton Sea are served by state-small water systems. The EPA or the County regulates these systems, but are not monitored as often as public water systems. Knowing which type of water you receive in your home will inform you of how to stay informed about its safety and quality.

How to find out where drinking water comes from

To determine potential contaminants in drinking water, people must know whether they receive water from a public water system or a private well. If they receive a monthly water bill or a landlord gets a monthly water bill, the home receives water from a public water system. They can contact their area's public water system for information about their drinking water. The public

water system ensures that the water in the home is safe and contacts customers or the landlord when it isn't. A home is most likely connected to a private well if they don't receive a monthly bill or pay a water system bill. This means there may be no information about the safety of the drinking water. The private well's owner is responsible for the water's safety and monitoring it for contaminants.

Water contaminants in Coachella Valley and their health effects

Common groundwater contaminants in Coachella Valley are arsenic, fluoride, uranium, chromium, nitrate, and perchlorate. Arsenic, fluoride, uranium, and chromium are metals that occur naturally in the environment. When groundwater runs through sediments below ground, some metals can be released from the rocks and sediments, especially when the groundwater pH is high. Nitrate often comes from fertilizer use near agricultural areas, and perchlorate can occur

naturally or come from industrial processes like rocket fuel or fireworks manufacturing. Arsenic is found at particularly high concentrations in tap water in wells near the Salton Sea. The other groundwater contaminants are found at mid to low concentrations. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) has established thresholds for the maximum amount of contaminant allowed in drinking water.

How to test drinking water at home

People can purchase water testing kits at local hardware stores to test their drinking water. Different kits can provide results for biological and/or chemical contaminants in their water. If people receive water from a public water system, the water system or district may notify them

through the mail if there is a problem with their water. Otherwise, the water district's phone number will be on the water bill or online, and people can request a "consumer confidence report" at any time to receive information about tap water quality.

For more information

- [Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation](#)
- [Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability](#)
- [Informational Slides for Water Quality and Health](#)
- [Water system boundary data map](#)
- [Guide to Community Drinking Water Advocacy](#)

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