

What You Can Do to Protect Your Drinking Water

Be Involved!

- Attend public hearings on land use and permitting. Ask for an environmental impact statement. Ask questions about specific plans to protect your water source. Participate in state and water system funding decisions.
- Volunteer to monitor water quality upstream from your water source. If your water source is a river, lake or stream, you can call your state to find out how well the Clean Water Act standards for your drinking water source protect your drinking water.
- Support your local utilities.



Photo by Tim McCabe, Natural Resources Conservation Services

Be Observant!

- Look for announcements in the local media for activities that could pollute your source water.
- Report any suspicious activities in or around your water supply to local authorities or call 911 immediately.

Be Informed!

- Read the annual Consumer Confidence Report provided by your public water system.
- Learn about potential threats to your water from your state's Source Water Assessment
- Find out whether Clean Water Act standards protect your drinking water source.



Don't Contaminate!

- Reduce or eliminate pesticide application.
- Reduce the amount of trash you create.
- Recycle used oil.
- Reduce paved areas.
- Keep pollutants away from boat marinas and waterways.

**Unfold this brochure for an illustration
of the risks and barriers that affect drinking water.**

A Message from the Administrator

Christine Todd Whitman



I believe water is the biggest environmental issue we face in the 21st Century in terms of both quality and quantity. In the 30 years since its passage, the Clean Water Act has dramatically increased the number of waterways that are once again safe for fishing, swimming, and drinking. Despite this great progress in reducing water pollution, many of the nation's waters still do not meet water quality goals. I challenge you to join President Bush and me to finish the business of restoring and protecting our nation's waters for present and future generations.

For More Information

For more information, contact EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791 or visit www.epa.gov/safewater.

You may also contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (4606-M)
Washington, DC 20460



Printed on recycled paper.

*Cover: water tower photo by Lynn Betts,
Natural Resources Conservation Service*

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water
EPA 816-F-02-012 • July 2002



*In celebration of the 30th anniversary
of the Clean Water Act, EPA presents*

Protect Your Drinking Water



Protect Your Drinking Water

We rely on a safe and abundant water supply for the health of our families and communities.



What is the Source of Our Water Supply?

If you live in a large city, your source of drinking water is probably a lake, river, or reservoir. If you live in a rural area, your source water may be ground water. In any case, your drinking water starts its journey to your tap from a watershed. A watershed is the land area that drains to a single body of surface water or to ground water. Everything that happens in the watershed can affect the quality of your water supply.

Did you know?

- Americans drink more than one billion glasses of tap water per day.
- Children in the first 6 months of life consume seven times as much water per pound as the average American adult.



What Happens in a Watershed That Can Affect Drinking Water?

Our drinking water resources are constantly under siege from multiple threats that directly affect water quality. Some are naturally occurring: storms, floods, fires. Most are caused by us: our activities at home, work, and play.

STORMWATER RUNOFF is the single biggest threat to the health of our waterways. As this water washes over roofs, pavement, farms, and grassy areas, it picks up fertilizers, pesticides, litter, etc., and deposits them in surface water and ground water. Here are some of the multiple threats that we cause through activities in our watershed.

Every Year:

- We apply *67 million pounds of pesticides* that contain toxic and harmful chemicals to our lawns.
- We produce more than 230 million tons of municipal solid waste—approximately *5 pounds of trash or garbage per person per day*—that contain bacteria, nitrates, viruses, synthetic detergents, and household chemicals.
- Nearly *half a million of our animal factory farms produce 130 times the amount of waste of the human population* and are a potential source of bacteria, viruses, nitrates, and animal steroids.
- The more than *12 million of our recreational and house boats* and 10,000 boat marinas release solvents, gasoline, detergents, and raw sewage directly into waterways.

Multiple Risks Require Multiple Barriers.

The best barrier against pollution is **PREVENTION**. Keeping contaminants out of the drinking water source protects the environment and reduces the need for costly treatment. Your state is in the process of identifying sources of drinking water and potential threats so that your community can take appropriate steps to protect the watershed.

After contaminants get into the source water, the best barrier is **RISK MANAGEMENT**. Your public water system is the first line of defense. Water utilities treat nearly 34 billion gallons of water every day. The Safe Drinking Water Act requires them to collect and treat water, hire trained and qualified operators, and have an emergency response plan in case of natural disaster or terrorist attack.



RISK AND COMPLIANCE MONITORING is another important barrier to protect drinking water resources. Your community constantly monitors water quality at the source, at the treatment plant after it has been treated and disinfected, at the distribution system, which delivers water through pumps and pipes to your home, and, in some cases, at the tap.

Did you know?

In North America, the total miles of water pipeline and aqueducts equal approximately one million miles—enough to circle the globe 40 times.

Funding and technical assistance can help systems provide safe drinking water. If all these efforts fail, enforcement actions can be taken against the system.

The **INDIVIDUAL ACTION BARRIER** that makes the other three barriers work is — **you**, and what you decide to do. Look to the next page for a variety of actions that you can take.

