

**The Wisconsin REALTORS® Association
REAL ESTATE ADVISOR**

**Is Your Drinking Water Safe?
(Public Water Utilities)**

Drinking a glass of water is usually considered a healthy activity, but on occasion, media coverage of water quality issues has made many people think twice before filling a glass from the tap. In one recent example, the EPA proposed to reduce the maximum allowable amount of arsenic in public water systems from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb by 2006. More recent EPA reports suggest that the safe level for arsenic may be 3 ppb.

The truth is that no water is naturally pure, not even bottled water. In nature, water collects impurities from everything it touches as it flows in streams, sits in lakes, and filters through layers of soil and rock in the ground. Some of these substances are harmless, but at certain levels some minerals can make water unpalatable or even unsafe. While most drinking water is safe, you should know how to find out if there are unsafe levels of contaminants in the water leaving your faucet.

Public water utilities regularly perform exhaustive water purity tests. These tests are summarized in “Consumer Confidence Reports” (CCR) that are issued annually to every customer of _____ (*identify water utility(ies) in publication territory*) water utility. A copy of this report may be obtained either from your water utility or from the DNR Web site at [http://oraweb.dnr.state.wi.us/inter1/plsql/pws2\\$.startup](http://oraweb.dnr.state.wi.us/inter1/plsql/pws2$.startup). Your CCR lists the contaminants found in your drinking water, the levels at which they were found, an indication of whether these levels are safe, and the actual or likely source of each contaminant. You may notice that the water utility tests for a number of substances that are not shown on the CCR. If the testing lab does not find readable levels of a particular contaminate, it is not included in the report.

The CCR does not cover testing for the lead that may leach into the water from the pipes in your yard and house. The homeowner must initiate this test. Contact the DNR at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/welltest.htm#cert%20labs>, or call 608-266-0821 for the name and number of your local DNR water specialist.

The CCR is informative but relatively short and technical. For more information, contact the local water utility, which is best equipped to answer questions about your local water supply. The DNR provides the best statewide source for public water system information on their Web site at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/test2.htm>.

For an EPA overview of drinking water issues, read *Water on Tap: A Consumer's Guide to the Nation's Drinking Water* at <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/wot/wot.html>. For other assistance, please contact the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.