

Rush River Assessment Project Testing Reveals Arsenic in Drinking Water

Results of recent testing of rural drinking water has revealed that many area wells exceed the drinking water standard for Arsenic concentration. Thirty-seven percent of samples collected from 183 area wells tested over the drinking water standard set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

This past May, RRAP offered free testing for Arsenic in well water. The testing, which was partially funded by the Department of Health, was made available to all residents living in Rush River Watershed. Testing revealed that 68 of the 183 wells tested for Arsenic were over the drinking water standard. These wells were found throughout the watershed and concentrations did not appear to be related to well depth, as previously thought.

The current drinking water standard for Arsenic was reduced from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb in the fall of 2001. The lowering of the standard was prompted by new studies on the health effects of Arsenic. The drinking water standard addresses the long-term effects of exposure to low concentrations of Arsenic. These long-term effects may increase the likelihood of certain cancers, such as skin, bladder, lung and prostate and non-cancerous effects such as, skin pigmentation, keratosis, diabetes, anemia, pulmonary and neurological problems. Consuming water with Arsenic levels above 10 ppb does NOT mean you will develop health problems, but it does put you slightly more at risk.

The contamination of drinking water by Arsenic can result from either natural or human activities. Arsenic is an element that occurs naturally in rocks, soil, water, air, plants and animals. The majority of Arsenic used by industry in the U.S. is for wood preservative purposes. Arsenic found in drinking water in this area is thought to be naturally occurring from bedrock.

Residents who have drinking water over 10 ppb are encouraged to install systems to reduce Arsenic. The two most commonly used methods of treating well water for Arsenic, according to the Minnesota Department of Health, are reverse osmosis and distillation. Both systems are usually installed at the point of source (tap that you get your drinking water from). Body contact (such as bathing) with water high in Arsenic is not a health concern. Reverse Osmosis units range in cost from \$300 to \$3000 and vary in quality and effectiveness. Replacement membranes cost \$100 to \$200 and filter cartridges around \$50.

If you missed the Arsenic well water clinic last May, but are interested in having your water tested for Arsenic on your own, you can bring a sample to one of the laboratories listed below. Testing for Arsenic runs from \$15 to \$25.

Minnesota Valley Testing Laboratory
1126 North Front Street
New Ulm, MN 56073-0249
(507) 354-8517

Brown-Nicollet Community Health Services
322 South Minnesota Avenue
St. Peter, MN 56082
(507) 934-4140