Antimony in Drinking Water

Antimony is a naturally occurring, highly toxic metal that can contaminate drinking water supplies. Most antimony compounds found in drinking water have no taste or smell, making identification of contamination only possible with testing.

What are the sources of antimony?

- Naturally occurring in groundwater due to weathering of rock and soils
- Used in flame retardants, alloys, metal solder, and electronics
- Smelting, mining, and glass manufacturing

What are the health effects of antimony?

Absorption of antimony depends on the type of chemical compound in which the metal is present. Ingestion from food and/or drinking water is a more important route of exposure than dermal (skin) absorption for the general population.

Long-term (chronic) or high-level exposure can cause lung and heart disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, stomach ulcers, and cardiovascular problems.

What are the drinking water guidelines for antimony?

The Safe Drinking Water Act sets protective standards, called Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs), for more than 90 contaminants that can potentially be found in drinking water. MCLs are practical treatment levels calculated to be protective of human health.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set the MCL for antimony at 6 parts per billion (ppb).

What actions can well owners take to reduce the risk associated with antimony?

Residents who use a private well as a drinking water source should have the well water tested for antimony contamination upon move in; every 5-10 years; or as needed. Testing results will help determine if well owners need to take steps to limit antimony exposure from well water, such as installing a treatment system. Boiling water does not remove antimony.

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