



Arsenic in Drinking Water

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

What are the sources of arsenic?

- Naturally occurring in groundwater due to weathering of rock and soils
- Arsenic/lead alloys in batteries, metal solder, and ammunition
- Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA) wood treatment for outdoor use (phased out in 2003 for most household uses)

What are the health effects of arsenic?

Health effects include, but are not limited to pulmonary disease, increased blood pressure and hypertension, atherosclerosis, diabetes, cataracts, neuroglial effects, and developmental effects. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classifies arsenic as a known human carcinogen.

What are the drinking water guidelines for arsenic?

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) sets protective standards, called Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs), for over 90 contaminants that can potentially be found in drinking water.

The EPA MCL for arsenic is 10 parts per billion (ppb) with a non-enforceable Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) of 0 ppb. MCLGs are an ideal goal, whereas MCLs are practical treatment levels calculated to be protective of human health and are the enforceable limit set by the SDWA.

Many aquifers in New Mexico have levels of naturally occurring arsenic that are above the MCL. As a result, some public water utilities in New Mexico have arsenic treatment systems or blend water sources to lower concentrations to levels protective of human health.

What actions can well owners take to reduce the risks associated with arsenic?

Residents who use a private well as a drinking water source should have the well water tested for arsenic 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 arsenic exposure from well water, such as installing a treatment system. Boiling water does not remove arsenic.

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