



NEWS

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Drinking Water Week

Norristown, PA (May 9, 2013) – National Drinking Water Week is May 5 to May 11, 2013. The purpose is to raise public awareness and understanding of drinking water in both public and private supplies, thus bringing attention to this precious resource.

Everyone is familiar with the basic needs for water, such as drinking and washing dishes, but there are a variety of essential uses residents frequently overlook. These include bathing, washing clothes, flushing toilets, watering lawns, and washing cars. Here is an interesting fact: to produce one gallon of milk, a dairy cow must drink four gallons of water.

For the millions of households served by water from private wells, there are no federal regulations for overseeing their water quality. It is the responsibility of homeowners to test and treat these wells themselves. At a minimum, private wells should be tested annually for microbiological contaminants. Wells should also be tested for bacteria when any work is done in or around the well and after heavy rains where surface water infiltration may occur.

Wells should also be checked for various other contaminants when there is any change in taste, odor, or appearance. Some residents mistakenly believe if water is clear, then it must be clean; In fact, some of the potential chemical or organic contaminants are odorless, tasteless, and colorless.

Historically, throughout the United States and the world, it was very common for people to become sick from diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and dysentery. It wasn't until the 19th century that a connection was made between microscopic organisms in water and public health. Water was considered clean if it was clear, which is unfortunately a common myth still believed by people today.

The first water facility to deliver water to an entire town and the first use of ozone for disinfection were in European countries. Filters were first developed and used to provide a more aesthetically pleasing product, before being recognized for their ability to remove undesirable particles.

Significant improvements to water treatment in the latter part of the 19th century led to the numbers of typhoid and cholera cases plummeting at the turn of the century. Unfortunately, these diseases are still rampant in countries where sanitary sewage disposal and treated water systems are non-existent. University of Ottawa professor John Last, MD, DPH has been quoted as saying that modernized sanitation methods and access to potable water have increased the lifespan and improved the general health of Americans more than any other advancement in the field of medicine.

In 1914 the U. S. Department of the Treasury publicized the country's first drinking water microbiological standard. This led to the U. S. Public Health Service adopting the first set of drinking water standards in 1942. By the early 1960s, more than 19,000 municipal water systems were in operation throughout the United States. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established in 1970 and was instrumental in developing the Safe Drinking Water Act, enacted in 1974. Today these regulations ensure that the water residents receive from their public water suppliers is safe for drinking and protective of public health.

Drinking Water Week is dedicated to educating residents about the importance of their water. Residents should strive to remain vigilant of this precious natural resource, and become informed of ways to conserve and to protect it from pollution.

During Drinking Water Week some of the local public water suppliers will sponsor a variety of events to aid in the education and awareness effort.

The Montgomery County Health Department has strived to preserve, promote, and protect drinking water quality since its inception in October 1991. The Division of Water Quality Management has overseen the on-lot sewage disposal program and individual water supply permitting program to achieve these goals. For further information regarding these programs and related services, please refer to the services section (<http://www.montcopa.org/index.aspx?NID=1138>) of the Health Department web page at www.health.montcopa.org or call 610-278-5117 to learn more.