

# IEPA and IDPH Launch Initiative to Encourage Private Well Owners to Guard Against Potential Groundwater Contamination

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On September 30, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), and the Department of Public Health (IDPH) announced the launch of the Safe Well Water Initiative 2009 to increase private well owner awareness of the need and responsibility for regular testing of drinking water.

Illinois EPA and IDPH are partnering to help inform private well owners in Illinois of the need to have regular testing for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and other contaminants that may have historically contaminated groundwater sources. The agencies have become increasingly aware of groundwater contamination that could have affected private drinking water wells.

two state agencies, in partnership with local governments and the private sector, want to increase awareness of the need for regular testing, particularly for VOCs.

In recent years, VOCs are increasingly being found in groundwater in many areas of our state, and across the nation, as a result of the breakdown of cleaning solvents and fuels, such as gasoline, that were historically associated with sources such as gas stations, dry cleaners, auto and boat engine repair shops, printing shops and metal parts fabrication facilities.

Common management practices before environmental regulations took effect in the early 1980s included the storage, use and disposal of solvents by dumping them on the ground after use, and often resulted in accidental release of solvents and gasoline products from storage containers.

As part of this initiative, the agencies are distributing fact sheets, well testing instructional brochures and other documents via e-mail to numerous government and professional groups for distribution to their members and to the general public. A radio public service announcement spot was also recorded and distributed to stations across the state. While most

Illinoisans receive their drinking water through community water supplies, they may be surprised to learn there are still a significant number of citizens across the state, in rural, suburban and urban areas who are not connected to a public water supply and rely on an estimated 400,000 private wells for their water source. While it is ultimately the responsibility of the private well owners themselves to make sure their water is safe, the

Over time, solvents and gasoline-related chemicals slowly make their way into groundwater and move with groundwater. Consequently, the contaminants may affect private wells that are near locations of historical spills or releases. Most VOC contamination cannot be detected by odor, taste or visual appearance. The only way to know whether your well water is safe is by testing it.

Private well owners in urban or suburban areas with business, industry or gas stations nearby are particularly encouraged to have their water tested for VOCs, as are private well owners in rural areas that may be affected by nearby leaking fuel tanks.

The new initiative is a follow-up to one in 2005, when IEPA and IDPH joined together on a private well water education initiative that focused on testing for bacteria, nitrate, radium and arsenic, and other contaminants. With this expanded initiative, the Illinois EPA and IDPH encourage private well owners to learn as much as possible about chemical threats to safe drinking water and to have their well water tested. Private well owners are encouraged to talk with their local/county health department or the nearest IDPH regional office for advice on what to test for, depending on where they live.



The Illinois EPA has posted several helpful links and documents in its website: [www.epa.state.il.us/community-relations/fact-sheets/safe-water-wells/index](http://www.epa.state.il.us/community-relations/fact-sheets/safe-water-wells/index), including fact sheets, instructions on private well testing, a list of accredited laboratories, the reasons that groundwater becomes contaminated, a list of chemicals for which public water supplies must test, fact sheets on potential health effects and methods of reducing exposure.

Once the private well water test results have been received by the owner, IDPH staff will evaluate the results and provide recommendations. Depending on the type and quantity of the chemicals, you can greatly reduce your exposure by using another source of drinking water. Since VOCs evaporate into the air, you can reduce your exposure further by running the bathroom exhaust fan during baths and showers. Exposure to these chemicals from other water use should be very small.

For more information, the Illinois EPA can be contacted by phone at (217) 557-6474 or by e-mail at [epa.safe.water@illinois.gov](mailto:epa.safe.water@illinois.gov). The Illinois Department of Public

Health can be contacted on this issue at (217) 782-5830 or by e-mail at [dph.malins@illinois.gov](mailto:dph.malins@illinois.gov).

The website also includes links to site-specific notices of groundwater contamination and other information triggered by Illinois' Right to Know laws that keep the public informed about their public and private drinking water sources. The Illinois EPA will also provide postings required by the recently signed Public Act 4021, which requires that a press release be posted when the agency refers a public water supply for enforcement or sends a violation notice reporting that a groundwater supply poses a public health threat, or a public water supply operator submits fraudulent information to the agency.

