

Florida DEP Water Drinking Information

Where does my water come from?

These questions have undoubtedly crossed everyone's mind at some point, especially with today's emphasis on keeping our bodies adequately hydrated to maintain good health. Our water comes from six ground water wells. Five of those wells are in the Sand and Gravel Aquifer and one is in the Floridan Aquifer.

Fortunately, there's a wealth of information available to the public, most of which is just a phone call or mouse click away that is provided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Drinking Water Program and will answer several commonly asked questions about our drinking water and will refer you to sources for additional information.

First, allow us to introduce the DEP.

The DEP is a state agency headquartered in Tallahassee with six district offices located throughout the state of Florida. Additionally, the DEP drinking Water Program works closely with several Florida Department of Health (DOH) county health departments that have regulating authority over their counties' public water systems. A public water system, or PWS, is any facility that serves drinking water to at least 25 people, or to at least 15 service connections, at least 60 days per year.

There are three categories of PWSs. The most common type of PWS is a community water system or CWS. A CWS serves drinking water year round to its customers and may range from mobile home parks to large municipal water systems. If you live in an urban or suburban area, chances are you get your drinking water from a CWS. The second type of PWS is a non-transient, non-community water system, or NTNCWS, which may include facilities such as schools, factories, and nursing homes that produce their own drinking water. The third type of PWS is a transient non-community water system, or TWS, which may include

service stations, campgrounds, restaurants, or any other facility that produces its own water for a transient group of people. Finally, those of us who live in rural communities may be served by very small systems (under 25 people). These are considered limited use systems and are regulated by the DOH. Private homes with their own wells are unregulated and water testing must be done at the homeowner's initiative and expense.

“Why is my water treated in the first place?”

All source water, be it from a well, river, lake natural spring, or reservoir, contains certain impurities and in some cases, contaminants and disease-causing microorganisms. All Florida PWSs are required to treat their water. At the very least, your water is disinfected through chlorination which is done in order to prevent the growth of disease-causing microorganisms. Furthermore, some source waters are naturally corrosive or have high concentrations of organic or inorganic substances. Source waters like these must undergo additional treatment to remove undesirable color or taste, or to prevent corrosion in pipes and water heaters.

If your PWS uses a surface water source such as a lake, river, or reservoir, it may also contain several impurities introduced through the atmosphere or from surface runoff. These impurities may include naturally-occurring materials such as decaying animal and vegetable matter as well as man-made material such as fertilizers that runoff from the land into the water body. As a result, surface water treatment plants are required to filter their water and provide a high level of disinfection. Well water usually requires less treatment than surface water because of the absence of surface impurities. Over 75% of Florida's population is served by water treatment plants that use groundwater as their sole source.

“Are there any contaminants left in my water after it's treated?”

Yes, but they are present in amounts that have been determined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) over several years of toxicological studies to pose minimal risk to human health.

“Would installing a water treatment device in my home give me cleaner water?”

Not necessarily. In fact, many point-of-use water treatment devices can add higher concentrations of sodium to your water. However, if you decide to install one, be aware that operational, maintenance, and replacement requirements should be followed to ensure that your water treatment device performs as represented by the company selling the device. Also, it may be helpful for you to know that it is unlawful for any person who solicits sale, rental, lease, or installation of any water treatment device to make false or misleading statements or claims regarding contamination problems in tap water.

“Is bottled water better for me than tap water?”

Again, not necessarily. Depending on the water source, bottled water is not tested as frequently as tap water for regulated contaminants as set forth by the state and federal governments. In Florida, bottled water is regulated by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. If you choose to drink a particular brand of bottled water regularly, we suggest you contact the company and request information on the frequency of water quality testing, together with a list of all contaminants tested and the amounts at which they were detected.

“Where can I get more information about my drinking water?”

You may contact your local DEP district office, or you may contact your DOH county health department. Just check your local directory under Government Listings. You can also look us up on the internet at www.dep.state.fl.us/water, then follow the various links. If you receive your water from a CWS, you should be sent an annual water quality report every July describing what contaminants your water is tested for and how it is treated. You can also contact your water utility directly. For more information on drinking water quality and testing, private

well owners should contact the DOH or check its website at www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/water.