



guardians of drinking water quality
DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE

Keeping your private water supply safe

What is a private water supply?

A private water supply is one which is not provided by a water company. About 1% of the population in England and Wales do not have a public supply of mains water to their home and instead rely on a private water supply. Mostly, but not exclusively, these occur in the more remote, rural parts of the country. The source of a private supply can be a well, borehole, spring, stream, river or lake but it can also be a storage structure or tank or a private water main which receives a bulk supply from a water company. The supply may serve just a single property or it can be much larger serving many properties and businesses a network of pipes.

What is the problem?

Safe drinking water is essential for the health of everyone. It is well documented that private water supplies pose a risk to public health because they are quite often not designed, managed or tested in the same way as public water supplies. The water source may be contaminated with bacteria, protozoa, parasites and viruses (micro-organisms) or other substances. Sometimes the contaminants affect only the appearance of the water but others cause serious illness or even death in vulnerable people. You may not be able to tell whether your water is safe because the contamination does not necessarily impart an objectionable smell, taste or colour. Over the years the Health Protection Agency has documented outbreaks of disease due to private water supplies and across Europe small household and community water supplies have been identified as a significant risk to human health.

If I am worried about a private supply what should I do?

Find out about your water supply

- who is responsible for its upkeep and maintenance (is there an agreement with the owner or other users about its management)
- where is the source?
- how does the water get to your property?
- Is the water treated in any way, either at source or at the tap?
- is the treatment equipment, pipes and tanks in good order & serviced regularly?



Keep your supply safe

Make sure you inspect all parts of your supply, including the catchment area, regularly to check it is in good order, protected from animals and has not been interfered with or damaged. Any defects found should be put right as quickly as possible.

Supplies from springs, wells or boreholes

Check whether the water source is adequately protected to stop surface run off from land getting into your supply, particularly at times of heavy rain. Ensure that slurry is not spread on the land near or upstream of the source and that animals do not graze in the vicinity.

Supplies from streams, rivers, lakes or ponds

The collection arrangement should include a settlement pond to allow larger particles to settle out before the water flows into any tank or pipes which make up the supply arrangements.

The collection arrangement should also include either a sand or gravel filter after the settlement pond to remove organic material and small animals. These filters will improve the clarity of the water but will not remove harmful micro-organisms and chemicals.

Ensure that the water being collected is not contaminated by discharges from a septic tank or a waste water discharge upstream of the draw off point.

Supplies from farmland where animals graze or manure is spread

- Divert rain water run-off so it does not flow into your supply (for example, with a small ditch leading away from your supply)
- Check that the farmer is aware of the drinking water supply and the need to avoid contaminating it by farming activity.
- Fencing may be necessary to stop farm and other animals from gaining access to areas where they could contaminate the water source.

If your supply has water collection chambers and/or storage tanks

- These should have watertight and vermin-proof walls and lids
- Tops of chambers or tanks should be above ground level to prevent water from surrounding land flowing into them
- Any overflow pipes or vents in chambers and tanks should be screened to stop small animals and debris from entering them
- The collection chamber should not be close to any soak away or drain
- Find out what any pipes to your tap are made of and whether they are in good condition, consider removing any lead pipe or galvanised steel pipes and replacing them with blue plastic water pipe.
- Make sure that any fuel storage is sited well away from the water supply and situated in a bund to capture any spills which could contaminate the water supply by migration through the soil.



If you supply water to others or carry out a commercial activity

If you supply water to other people in the course of a business, for example by bed and breakfast, renting out property or using water for a campsite, café or other food production, you have a duty in law to ensure that the water is safe and wholesome and tested in accordance with regulations. Until you are sure that your supply meets all these safety requirements you should seek advice and consider the need to

- Advise boiling all water for drinking and food production or
- Provide other users with bottled water

How do I get advice on my supply?

Local councils are responsible for ensuring the safety of all private water supplies and they may have carried out checks in the past, although depending on how many people use the supply, this may have been some time ago. Generally only the larger private supplies are checked regularly. From January 2010, under new regulations, local councils will be carrying out risk assessments for all supplies in their area except those serving a single household with no commercial activity. To find out about this and to obtain advice you should contact the environmental services department for the local council. You can ask them for general advice and also ask them to carry out a risk assessment and testing, although you or the owners are responsible for the costs of this and any other work on the supply.

Should I improve my supply?

If your supply is contaminated or at risk of becoming contaminated, to safeguard your health and that of your family and visitors to your home you should make any necessary improvements which may involve installing treatment, replacing pipes or carrying out maintenance or other improvements. If the supply serves more than one household you are under a duty in law to carry out remedial action to secure that the water supply is safe and wholesome at all times. This duty applies to all relevant persons involved with the supply and the costs can be shared with other users by agreement. The local council can serve a notice requiring improvements to be made and it is an offence not to comply with such a notice.

What else can I do?

If you no longer want to use your private supply, you can ask your local water company about the feasibility of connecting to the public supply. If the supply serves others you can consider the possibility of putting in place a collective water management agreement and secure the services of a specialist to improve the supply arrangements. However it is always wise to involve the local council in your plans from the outset as they have access to a lot of helpful information and local service providers.

How do I find out more about the regulations?

If you cannot access the information you need, you can contact the Drinking Water Inspectorate about the regulations and we will put you in touch with the right person at your local council. From



January 2010 local councils are required to provide the Drinking Water Inspectorate with details of all private supplies in their area and in future we will be publishing summaries of this information on our website.

How do I find out about products and treatment devices?

A wide variety of information about products and services to deal with various contaminants in private water supplies is available from:

British Water
1 Queen Anne's Gate
London
SW1H 9BT

Tel: 020 7957 4554

Website: www.britishwater.co.uk

