

WATER TESTING ABC

This article, written by the American Ground Water Trust was originally published in
THE AMERICAN WELL OWNER, 2001, Number 1]

THE ABC'S OF WATER TESTING

If you own a private well you are responsible for having the water tested on a regular basis to insure that it is safe to drink. An annual bacteria and nitrate test, will cost around \$25. This test should also be done after any repairs are done to a well or after a new well is installed. If you have a baby less than six months old you need the assurance that your well water has less than 10 parts per million of nitrate. If there are nitrates at high levels in water used to mix baby formula for infants, the result could be methemoglobinemia or "blue baby syndrome".

All wells should have at least a one-time test to determine the presence and the level of potentially harmful contaminants such as lead, pesticides, arsenic, fluoride, gasoline or radon. If there is no record of such a test for your home it makes sense to take a sample to your local laboratory. Remember that taste, smell, and visual appearance will not detect contaminants. It may look good and taste good, but only a test can assure you that it is also doing you good. Your local health department or local certified testing laboratory can recommend tests appropriate to your area.

A basic test of water chemistry that determines mineral content of your well water is also an option worth considering and such a test is very important if you intend to install any water conditioning equipment. The basic test would include pH (acidity), iron and manganese, hardness, chloride, sodium and total dissolved solids (TDS). These inexpensive tests are usually available as a "package deal" from certified laboratories and the results are important for assessing water quality problems you may have such as color, taste or odor, water hardness, or staining of clothes and fixtures. These are all problems associated with the mineral content of your water and most can be effectively treated with home treatment devices. (See related article this issue "How to Choose a Water Conditioning Contractor").

Contact your local health department for more information. They can help you locate a state-certified drinking water laboratory and recommend if any further testing of your water is necessary. It is important that you follow the instructions from the laboratory because incorrect sampling procedures can lead to inaccurate or meaningless test results. You may also call the Trust toll-free information line for help interpreting what your test results mean at 1-800-423-7748.

[© American Ground Water Trust. This article may be reprinted for non-commercial educational purposes provided it is used in its entirety and that reference is made to its source as an article in *THE AMERICAN WELL OWNER*, 2001, Number 1]