

Residents may be in touch with THOs about their public or private water supply. While the THOs role in drinking water is primarily focused on rental housing, THOs should be aware of where to refer residents for information about water testing, spills near a water source, notices issued by the Drinking and Groundwater Protection Division, drought conditions and flooding.

Public Drinking Water Sources

Approximately 6 out of 10 Vermonters get their water from public water supplies that are regulated by the state and federal government. A public water supply is a system that has at least 15 connections and/or serves 25 people for at least 60 days out of the year.

These regulations are enforced by the Department of Environmental Conservation's Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division. Included in this classification are community systems, which are used by year-round residents, and non-community systems, which do not serve year-round residents (e.g. schools, workplaces, or restaurants). All water systems that fit into the designation of a public water supply are tested for contaminants regularly and community systems are required to send yearly Consumer Confidence Reports (or CCR) to their customers.

Private Drinking Water Sources

Approximately 40% of Vermonters use private water supplies such as wells or springs. These water sources serve single-family homes or small groups of homes and are typically monitored and maintained by their owners. Although many rental properties use water provided by public water systems, some are served by private wells or springs.

There are many contaminants in well or spring water that may cause health effects. Although private water supplies are not regulated, the Health Department recommends testing for:

1. Coliform bacteria (Kit A) every year
2. Inorganic chemicals (Kit C+) every five years
3. Naturally occurring alpha radiation (Kit RA) every five years

These kits are grouped in the Vermont Homeowner Testing Package and can be purchased from the Vermont Public Health Lab by calling 802-338-4724 or online at www.HealthVermont.gov/lab/forms

The Health Department offers laboratory analyses, guidance, and technical advice on treatment options.

KEY POINTS

- **The Health Department recommends regular testing of private drinking water supplies.**
- **Under Vermont's Rental Housing Health and Safety Code, private drinking water provided to tenants must be free from harmful levels of contaminants.**

Note: New wells and springs developed after 2019 and some activities, such as deepening a well or installing a new septic system, require testing as part of the permitting processes issued by the Department of Environmental Conservation. More information about the testing requirements can be found at www.HealthVermont.gov/environment/drinking-water/new-drilled-well-testing-what-you-need-know

Role of the Town Health Officer

The THO's role in drinking water is primarily focused on rental housing in assuring that tenants that use private drinking water sources are provided with potable drinking water. A THO may become involved with private water supplies if they are contacted about the contamination of a private drinking water source or, to assist homeowners by giving them educational information or referral resources. A THO will typically not become involved with situations concerning public water supplies as they are regulated by the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division.

The THO's role in drinking water is primarily focused on rental housing

Rental Property Water Supplies

Tenants are entitled to an adequate supply of safe drinking water. Under Vermont's Rental Housing Health and Safety Code, private drinking water provided to tenants must be free from harmful levels of contaminants. If a rental property uses water from a public water supply, the potability and compliance with federal and state law is managed by the municipality's water operator and THOs are not typically involved in responding to customer concerns. If contacted by a concerned customer of a public water supply, the THO should direct the customer to their water supplier or the Department of Environmental Conservation at 800-823-6500.

When the drinking water for a rental property comes from a private water supply, the quality of the drinking water is not guaranteed. The landlord or property owner is responsible for ensuring the potability of the water for their tenants. In towns with municipal inspection agreements with the Division of Fire Safety, or if requested by the Division of Fire Safety, THOs may be called upon to ensure the water supply meets Vermont potability standards. The only way to ensure these standards are met is to have the water tested. Private water sources should be tested for bacteria annually, and inorganic contaminants (such as arsenic, nitrate, and uranium) and gross alpha radiation at least every 5 years.

The THO should encourage landlords who have not completed recommended water testing to do so. Landlords can purchase the *Vermont Homeowner Testing Package* from the Vermont Department of Health Lab by calling 802-338-4724. This package includes the required testing and costs \$159.

If the landlord or property manager does not respond in a reasonable timeframe, refuses to test, or is unreachable, the THO can get drinking water test kits by reaching out to the private drinking water program at ahs.VDHDDrinkingWaterProgram@vermont.gov or by calling 802-489-7339. An attempt to have the landlord comply with testing should be made before contacting the private drinking water program.

Non-Rental Private Water Supplies

When contacted by homeowners concerned about the safety of their private water supplies, THOs can refer individuals to the Environmental Health Division (Private Drinking Water Program) for technical assistance by email at ahs.VDHDDrinkingWaterProgram@vermont.gov or by calling 802-489-7339. Homeowners can purchase test kits through the Health Department Laboratory by calling 802-338-4724.

Occasionally, THOs will receive a call alerting them that the land activities of a neighbor or other party are contaminating a homeowner's water supply. Depending on the situation, the THO may need to facilitate testing, contact another state agency, work with the parties to come to a solution, or simply provide the parties with referral resources. If you observe or have knowledge of any activity that may violate Vermont's environmental laws, encourage the affected party to file an environmental violation report with the Department of Environmental Conservation at dec.vermont.gov/content/environmental-violation-report. The THO can also contact the Environmental Health Division (Private Drinking Water Program) for guidance on how to proceed.

If heating fuel or chemicals are known to have been spilled near someone's well or spring, the THO should advise them to report the spill to Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Spill Management Team during business hours (7:45 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) at 802-828-1138 or outside of business hours at 800-641-5005,. Individuals should not drink the water if they suspect a fuel or chemical spill has impacted their well or if their water smells sweet or like fuel or chemicals.

Public Water Supplies

Although THOs will generally not become involved with situations concerning public water supplies, they will be informed (by mail, from the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division) of any boil notices, 'do not drink' notices, or other emergency notices placed on water systems in their communities.

A boil notice is issued when the bacteria *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) are present in a public water supply, when there are any water outages/water main breaks, or when repairs are completed that do not meet industry standards. When a system is placed on a boil notice, residents will need to boil their water for one full minute before drinking, including using water for juice or formula, brushing teeth, making ice cubes, washing or using water for food preparation, and washing dishes. The Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division requires that system owners notify all affected users of any boil notices. THOs do not need to take any related action unless specifically requested by the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division. The notices are sent to THOs to keep them informed of problems in their communities.

In addition to the boil notices, the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division may occasionally call for a public water system to issue a 'do not drink' or a 'do not use' advisory. THOs will also get a system-specific email weekly every Monday (for as long as the system remains on BWN/DND) along with the system contact and operator until the situation is resolved.

THOs and Drinking Water

Residents will be warned not to drink or use their water at all. This can happen if there are chemicals or other contaminants in the water that may harm human health. If a 'do not drink' or 'do not use' order is issued, the Department of Environmental Conservation requires that system owners notify all affected users. More information about these notices and what uses are allowed during each type of notice can be found at anr.vermont.gov/document/public-water-notices.

Concerned customers of a public water supply may be directed to their water supplier or the Department of Environmental Conservation at 800-828-1535. THOs can encourage those affected to buy bottled water or source water from a site without a boil or do not drink notice, such as the town library, town hall, fire department, school, church or town office.

Drought Conditions

Occasionally, Vermont may experience drought conditions that result in public and private water supply shortages. The Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division will handle all public water supply shortages, but THOs may get calls about dry wells and springs in their communities. When contacted by homeowners regarding private water supply shortages, THOs should refer the individuals to the town selectboard and encourage residents to report their water shortage to the Department of Environmental Conservation at anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/droughtreporter. When the selectboard is made aware that several residents are out of potable water and have made the decision to support a resident's request for assistance, they must first attempt to get potable water through local resources (e.g., businesses, mutual aid agreements, freshwater haulers, etc.) If attempts to acquire potable water locally are not successful, the selectboard should look at existing state contracts. In the event potable water cannot be acquired through local resources or state contracts, the selectboard may contact Vermont Emergency Management to ask for support in coordinating the delivery of potable water to the Town. **Note: Towns are financially responsible for any water they order, or water the state orders on their behalf. In the event the situation becomes a federally declared disaster, Towns may be eligible for partial reimbursement.**

When shallow wells recover from a drought, homeowners should have them tested for bacterial contamination (coliform bacteria) before drinking the water. If a water source tests positive for coliform bacteria, it should be disinfected and retested. Testing recommendations, disinfection directions, and health effects of drinking water contaminants are available online at: HealthVermont.gov/water/drought

Flooding

Water may not be safe to use for drinking, cooking or cleaning after a flood. During and after flooding, private wells and springs can become contaminated with bacteria, microorganisms and other pollutants from sewage, heating oil, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals, and other substances that can cause serious illness.

Testing recommendations, disinfection directions, and health effects of drinking water contaminants are available online at: HealthVermont.gov/DrinkingWaterFlood

Contact:

Email the Private Drinking Water Program at ahs.VDHDDrinkingWaterProgram@vermont.gov or call 802-489-7339.