

STATE WATER BOARD RELEASES WELL-TESTING FINDINGS

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SACRAMENTO-The State Water Resources Control Board's Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment Program (GAMA) has reported its findings on water quality testing of 137 private "domestic" wells to San Diego County residents who accepted the offer of free well testing. The testing was done during the spring and winter of 2008.

The results show that 25 percent (34 of 137) tested positive for total coliform bacteria; and 18 percent (25 of 137) had nitrate levels at or above the drinking water standards. A summary of the results from the San Diego County sampling can be found at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/docs/sd_dwpsummary.pdf.

Residents, whose well water showed levels of contaminants higher than the drinking water standards, have been sent information on actions they can take. Including well re-testing, and depending on the results, investigating the construction of their wells and piping for possible sources of contamination. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/drinkingwater/Pages/Chemicalcontaminants.aspx>

Domestic wells are not regulated under the law. Unlike public drinking water systems, testing of private domestic wells is the responsibility of the well owner. When compared to public water wells, domestic wells typically are not as deep or as well-constructed. Therefore, it is not uncommon for changes to water quality to occur after well installation.

Most of the 137 wells that have been tested in the GAMA Domestic Well Project are located east of Interstate 15 in the mountainous central portion of the county. Test results from San Diego County differ from previous GAMA county focus areas because detections of radionuclides have been found to be above drinking water standards. The detection of radionuclides may indicate that "naturally occurring" chemicals present in rocks and soil in the area may responsible for the following results:

- * Gross Alpha 35% (19 of 54 wells above drinking water standards)
- * Uranium 30% (16 of 54 wells above drinking water standards)

GAMA tested private domestic wells in four other counties from 2003 to 2006: El Dorado, Yuba, Tehama, and Tulare. Those tests show: 27% (248 of 928) of the domestic wells sampled tested positive for total coliform. Fewer than 2% (11 of 749) of wells in El Dorado, Yuba and Tehama Counties combined were above the nitrate Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL). However, 41% (75 of 181) wells

in Tulare County were above the nitrate MCL. A summary of sampling results from GAMA county focus areas can be found at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/docs/overallsummarysheet03_07.pdf.

Although identification of specific contaminant sources is beyond the scope of the GAMA study, these results indicate that a high percentage of domestic wells may be vulnerable to contaminants from surface activities.

Since 2002, GAMA has sampled 1,067 domestic wells in the five county focus areas. The test results were compared to drinking water standards that apply to public water systems. GAMA tested for a variety of substances. A program description can be found at:

<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/voluntary.shtml>.

GAMA has other projects that are also studying groundwater quality, including one that is studying for a broader array of wells in California's highest use groundwater basins across the state. More information on GAMA projects can be found at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama>.