

State Water Resources Control Board

REVISED 1/23/07

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 9, 2006

SWRCB 06-032

Contact: Public Affairs
916 341-5254

SACRAMENTO—The State Water Resources Control Board's Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment Program (GAMA) has reported its findings to Tulare County residents who volunteered their wells to be tested for water quality.

Since 2002, GAMA has tested 928 private domestic wells in four county focus areas to assess the quality of water that private well owners rely upon. Although private domestic wells are not regulated under state law, 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/voluntry.html>.

Among the 181 private domestic wells tested in Tulare County (most are to the east of Highway 99), 33 percent (60 of 181) tested positive for total coliform bacteria; and 41 percent (75 of 181) had nitrate levels at or above the drinking water standard (23 were in both categories). A summary of the results from the Tulare County sampling can be found at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/voluntry.html#tulare>.

For comparison, of 747 private domestic wells tested previously by GAMA in Yuba, El Dorado, and Tehama County focus areas, 25 percent (188 of 747) tested positive for total coliform bacteria; and less than two percent (11 of 747) were above the nitrate drinking water standard. A summary of sampling results from GAMA focus areas can be found at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/docs/domestic_well_project_overall_summary_table_012307.pdf

Although identification of specific contaminant sources is beyond the scope of the GAMA study, these results indicate that a high percentage of private domestic wells may be vulnerable to contaminants from surface activities. When compared to public water wells, private domestic wells typically are not as deep or as well-constructed, and they are not routinely tested.

Residents whose well water showed high levels of contaminants were sent printed information on actions they can take. Such actions include re-testing their wells immediately for the constituents found at high levels and, depending on the follow-up test results, investigating the construction of their wells for possible sources of contamination.

GAMA is also looking at a more widespread and detailed assessment of water quality from a broader array of wells in the state's highest use groundwater basins. More information on GAMA activities can be found at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/gama>.

###