

Water Filter Issues

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Physicians for Social Responsibility estimates that up to 900,000 people get sick and 900 die in the U.S. each year from contaminated public and private drinking water. Despite the problems with public water, it is still just as safe as bottled water, with fewer environmental burdens.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, the U.S. EPA is responsible for setting national drinking water standards. The EPA regulates over 80 contaminants – including arsenic, e-coli, cryptosporidia, chlorine and lead – that may be found in drinking water from public water systems. The EPA says that 90 percent of U.S. public water systems meet its standards. Even though it may test fine at its source, public water may still pick up contaminants on the way to your home. Consequently, you may want to use a water filter to further ensure your water's safety.

Not every water filter type will eliminate every contaminant. You will save money, and ensure that you are targeting any contaminants in the water at your home, by doing a little research up front. Start by checking your water utility's "Consumer Confidence Report". The report details what contaminants have been found in your water utility's water and how the levels compare to national standards. You can call your utility and ask for a copy, or visit www.epa.gov/safewater to see if it is online.

While that report can tell you what's going on with the water in your area, only a test of the water coming out of your tap will tell you what you and your family are drinking for sure. To find a state-certified lab to test your water (which will charge a fee) visit www.epa.gov/safewater/labs, or call the EPA's Safe Water Hotline at 800-426-4791.

If your water comes from a private well, it is not regulated at all by the EPA, so you should have your water tested annually in late spring (when pesticide runoff will be at its worst), and anytime you notice a change in your water.

If you only have one or two contaminants, a smaller unit may meet your needs. To find a filter certified to remove the contaminants you're most concerned about, visit the online database: www.nsf.org/Certified/dwtu. If you find your water has serious safety issues, consider a multi-stage filter that can tackle a variety of filter types.

Many recommend looking for a filter certified by NSF (National Sanitation Foundation) International, a nonprofit organization that conducts safety testing for the food and water industries (www.nsf.org). NSF tests and certifies water filters to ensure that they both meet NSF safety standards and are effective at removing contaminants as claimed by the manufacturer. Underwriters Laboratories and the Water Quality Association also offer similar certification, based on NSF standards.

Above info from Co-Op America's Real Money July/Aug 2007.

For ratings on Water Filters see the Water Filters article in the May, 2007 edition of Consumers Reports magazine.