

# Drinking Water Pollution in the News



The following news articles are excerpts from Multi-Pure's email news bulletin, *iwaterdrops*. Articles are gathered from national and local newspapers and news services. The pollution highlights are organized by contaminant or type of violation.

Be sure to sign up for *iwaterdrops* if you have an email address. Each issue contains valuable drinking water news as well as distributor updates. All issues of *iwaterdrops* may be accessed online at [www.multipure.com/BusinessGuide/iwaterdrops.htm](http://www.multipure.com/BusinessGuide/iwaterdrops.htm).

Just send your email address to [editor@multipureco.com](mailto:editor@multipureco.com), or sign up when visiting the Business Guide online (under "Current Events at Multi-Pure").

## Washington, May 8, 2001

(Washington Post) – A water filter can be an economical way to make your tap water a lot more palatable. Treating your water can also add peace of mind by reducing contaminant levels to far below safety thresholds set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The one contaminant most people on public water systems need to be concerned about is lead, which can retard neurological development, especially in young children and fetuses.

While your local utility can ensure that lead levels in your area's water supply stay at or below EPA thresholds, it can't see what's inside your household plumbing. Lead leaching from pipes, solder or brass faucets and fittings is a particular problem in older houses.

Other possible contaminants in tap water that you might want to remove include Cryptosporidium,

Giardia and other microbes that can harm people with weak immune systems – infants, the frail elderly, those undergoing cancer treatment and people who are HIV-positive.



Chlorination byproducts like trihalomethanes may also be a health concern, particularly for pregnant women.

If you drink well water, your water treatment needs may be more complicated.

## Trichloroethylene (TCE) and Tetrachloroethylene (PCE)

**LISLE, IL, November 15, 2000** (Chicago Sun-Times) - 40 Lisle residents filed a federal lawsuit against a nearby metal fabricating plant they allege has contaminated their drinking water with a toxic chemical.

The lawsuit contends that Lockformer Co. for more than 20 years spilled an industrial solvent called trichloroethylene, or TCE, into the ground. Recent tests turned up TCE in 13 of 17 residential wells. Now neighbors worry that years of drinking and bathing with the water may have endangered their health.

**NORTHVALE, NJ, August 11, 2000** (Bergen Record) - Most of the drums excavated from a site in Livingston, NJ were decayed, and their contents [TCE (Trichloroethylene), PCE (tetrachloroethylene), and other solvents] had leaked into the ground, said Helga Crowley, the engineering consultant handling the project.

Five samples from five different groundwater-monitoring wells came back showing high levels of contamination. Further groundwater testing will be necessary to determine the extent of contamination.

**SANTA ROSA, CA, November 1, 2000** (Press Democrat) – A dangerous chemical turned up in water wells in a west Santa Rosa neighborhood. The extent of the problem is unknown, but as many as 100 households and businesses may be affected, according to the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Authorities went door-to-door in the area urging residents to use bottled water for drinking and cooking to avoid ingesting perchloroethylene (PCE).

So far, more than 80 wells have been tested and 13 showed PCE contamination, ranging from just over the state's acceptable levels to a fairly high level in a few wells.

While most wells in the area tested clean, the water board believes the plume of contamination is spreading.

# Drinking Water Pollution in the News



## VOCs and Trihalomethanes

**August 4, 2001, Chesapeake, VA** (The Virginian-Pilot) – The number of women alleging that the city's drinking water caused their miscarriages increased more than six-fold after 129 more lawsuits were filed in Chesapeake Circuit Court.

A total of 154 women are seeking more than \$1 billion from the city, alleging that Chesapeake allowed high levels of trihalomethanes (THMs) in the water. Still more lawsuits are expected.

THMs form when chlorine mixes with organic material such as algae and leaf particles, which are abundant in Chesapeake's Northwest River, the city's primary source of drinking water.

The lawsuits claim that since the early 1980s, the city has attempted to conceal from the public information about the concentration of THMs in the water and their adverse health effects.

In 1998, after tests showed levels of THMs above 75 parts per billion, the city issued a health warning that women who daily drank five or more glasses of water with such high THM levels could be at higher risk of miscarriage.

City officials have said THM levels dropped below that standard after Chesapeake opened a portion of its new water treatment plant later that year, although the women's lawyers contend that city records show levels exceeded 75 ppb in April 1999.

**US News, December 6, 1999** – The water in 47 percent of urban wells contains volatile organic compounds, a class of toxic chemicals found in gasoline, paints and plastics and used in industry, according to a report to be released this week by the U.S. Geological Survey. The USGS scientists estimate that 32 million people in urban areas and 10 million rural dwellers are using groundwater containing one or more volatile organic compounds.

### Harmful effects

Even small amounts of VOCs are considered important environmental contaminants because many are water-soluble and persist in the environment. "The kinds of health issues related to the contaminants discussed in the USGS report are chronic," says J. Charles Fox, the EPA's assistant administrator for water. "Over the life of a person, ingestion of these chemicals has been shown to have adverse health effects such as cancer, reproductive problems, and developmental effects."

Chloroform, a carcinogen and the common name for the chemical trichloroethylene, was the VOC most often detected. The chemical is a by-product of disinfection of water drawn from rivers and reservoirs for tap water. The fact that chloroform turned up in untreated groundwater indicates that disinfected water is migrating into groundwater from lawn irrigation, leaking water mains and sewers, according to the report.

This first national survey of VOCs will aid in evaluating water pollution.

## Antibiotics in the water supply

**USA Today, November 8, 2000** - American Teenager, Ashley Mulroy, recently won the Stockholm Junior Water Prize for her science project in which she searched for and FOUND antibiotics in the Ohio River. She also found those drugs in the drinking water in her hometown.



She is one of the first in the USA to look for such drugs in the nation's drinking water supply. Her study highlights an emerging scientific issue with alarming implications:

- Even low levels of antibiotics may help create superbugs: microorganisms that have evolved to survive an antibiotic's lethal assault.
- These superbugs may be causing "tens of thousands" of deaths in the USA each year.
- Public Health experts already have noted the rise of infection that cannot be stopped with the usual arsenal of antibiotics ..
- Water samples taken from sites near livestock or dairy farms had the highest concentrations.
- Antibiotics may leach into groundwater around hospitals if cases or bottles of expired drugs are dumped into a landfill.

Mulroy's study suggests a potential fix for waters laced with drugs such as antibiotics. She says that an activated charcoal filtration system removed most of the antibiotics in the tap water.

# Drinking Water Pollution in the News



## Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE)

**August, 2001, Sacramento, CA** (Associated Press) – The fuel additive MTBE has reached 48 wells in public water systems serving hundreds of thousands of people throughout the state, forcing closures or expensive treatments, state records show.

Data analyzed from the state Water Resources Control Board and the state Department of Health Services by the San Francisco Chronicle also show that leaks of

the additive from nearly 1,200 underground tank sites threaten the drinking water supply of millions of Californians.

The data do not include tens of thousands of private wells in California and hundreds of thousands nationwide. Such water supplies are not regulated by public agencies and generally are not tested for MTBE unless any holding tanks buried nearby cause concern.

State records show that the 1,189 underground tank sites leaking MTBE are within 1,000 feet of public supply wells or on vulnerable drinking water aquifers. An additional 1,729 leaking tank sites farther away from drinking water wells also could creep closer.

A U.S. health advisory suggests people not consume MTBE at greater than 35 parts per billion. The state limits MTBE at 13 ppb, and warns that water might have taste and odor problems at 5 ppb.

**Lincoln Journal Star, September 3, 2000** – Traces of MTBE, the gasoline additive that crippled water supplies in California, have been discovered in three municipal water systems in Nebraska.

State officials say the MTBE showed up in routine tests for volatile organic chemicals.

The Hyannis municipal well may have been contaminated by an old gasoline station about 500 feet away.

MTBE, which stands for methyl tertiary-butyl ether, has been

used as a gasoline additive to help reduce some of the nation's worst air pollution, but it also can poison aquifers

After the television news program "60 Minutes" called attention to the MTBE problem earlier this year, state officials said they didn't expect to find much of the additive in Nebraska because of the widespread use of ethanol.



But that hasn't been the case. Traces of MTBE are showing up not only in public water systems but also in places where gasoline stor-

**MORRO BAY, CA, October 15, 2000** (LA Times) - Because of a series of mistakes and coincidences, this Central Coast tourist hamlet is facing a serious water shortage. A chemical compound is threatening the city's wells. Preparing for the worst, the city council last week declared an emergency, allowing officials to require water conservation.

The problem began a year ago, when the city found that a chemical compound known as MTBE had gotten into the sewage plant through a cracked

line. After months of testing, the city believed it had found the source of the contamination: a local Shell gas station.

So far, corporate officials connected with the station have not accepted responsibility.

"One station can threaten an entire city's water supply," said Barry Groveman, co-author of Proposition 65, which requires warning labels on products that contain cancer-causing agents or substances that damage the repro-

*"We never know the worth of water until the well is dry."*

*- French Proverb*

age tanks were buried decades ago.

The state Department of Environmental Quality has found MTBE at 50 sites across Nebraska as part of its ongoing investigation into leaking underground gasoline tanks. That's about 30 more sites than the agency had on its list in March, and officials expect the number of sites to grow.

ductive system.

Morro Bay usually gets its drinking water from the State Water Project, but the project informed the city that it would suspend deliveries this winter to do routine maintenance on pumping equipment. The city had planned to pump water from its Morro Valley well field to make up for the loss, but the MTBE pollution is close by and the city fears that drawing down the aquifer would spread the pollution.

# Drinking Water Pollution in the News



## Clean Water Act Violations

**Washington, DC, May 28, 2001** (ENS) – More than one in four – 26 percent – of the nation's largest industrial, municipal and federal facilities were in "significant" violation of the Clean Water Act at least once during a recent 15-month period, a new report indicates.

Major findings of the report include:

The ten states with the greatest number of major facilities in Significant Non-Compliance (SNC) were Texas, Ohio, New York, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Florida, Missouri, and Indiana.

159 major facilities were in SNC during the entire 15-month period.

Of the 42 industrial facilities in SNC for the entire 15-month period, EPA records indicate only one received a fine over the past five years.

**APRIL 5, 2000** (Environmental News Network) - A report released by the National Wildlife Federation says that states have ignored the Clean Water Act. It also documents how this negligence has made humans and marine animals sick, caused more harm to endangered wildlife, and polluted more than 300,000 miles of rivers and shoreline and 5 million acres of lakes.

According to the report, the states have focused nearly all of their attention on pollution discharged from sewer systems and factories. Many continue to ignore the problems caused by non-point pollution sources. The report notes that:

One of five drinking water systems violates safety requirements

Each year, contaminated drinking water kills more than 900 people and makes another 900,000 sick in the United States.



**August, 2001, Washington, DC** (USA Today) – The EPA and the states fail to track hundreds of thousands of sources of pollution contaminating the nation's rivers, lakes and streams and do a poor job of policing many of the polluters they do know about, the agency's own investigator reports.

The EPA's inspector general, in a scorching report, said the system isn't working:

- ❑ The EPA's system for tracking pollution permits and compliance is "incomplete, inaccurate and obsolete." The system hasn't had a major overhaul since 1982. It doesn't monitor hundreds of thousands of major pollution sources such as large hog farms and sewers that overflow during storms. The EPA doesn't require the states to track those sources, and the states don't want to do more data entry.
- ❑ Regulators know that dirty runoff from farms, storms and roads is a major source of water pollution. Yet state agencies and the EPA continue to focus on pollution from large facilities, such as factories and sewage-treatment plants, that are more visible and easier to police.
- ❑ Some states reported that more than half the facilities that broke pollution laws in 1999 did so again in 2000.

**LAWRENCE, MA, March 18, 2000** (Boston Globe) - A recently retired senior chemist for the Lawrence Water Department has been charged with falsifying tests of the city's drinking water for 2 ½ years when he performed no tests at all but recorded results nonetheless, according to federal charges. State officials said it's impossible after the fact to say if the actions allowed any unhealthy situations to go undetected.