



Feature Column

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Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

Water Works Wonders

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Like the air we breathe, we don't give much thought to the water we drink until something goes wrong. But supplying safe drinking water to 2.7 million Arkansans from a river, well or reservoir is a big and important job. We're proud of the part we play here at the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), but safe and potable drinking water is not just the work of our engineers, inspectors and technicians, but of the water system operators and contractors literally out in the trenches.

These are the guys who can fix a broken line by feel in a flooded trench or take apart a pump and put it right by flashlight. These are the guys that work all night to repair the system so you can take your morning shower.

As part of ADH's role, the Engineering Division helps the state's many water systems comply with federal and state drinking water requirements. The division's number one goal is to provide technical assistance and support to public water system operators to ensure safe water to people in their community.

The engineers and other colleagues in the drinking water program do that by one-on-one consultation with operators. They train and license system operators for the state. System operators must pass tough testing requirements in order to receive a license. ADH engineers also provide on-going technical support to the system operators.

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To keep the state's drinking water supplies safe, we test for hundreds of chemicals and microbes--in some cases down to parts per trillion--to meet the stringent water quality regulations. The number and types of tests on each system's water depends on the size of the system and the number of people it serves, as well as the type of piping materials used, type of source used and treatment provided. When water systems are unable to meet these standards, the agency informs the public and works to ensure that the water utility returns to compliance.

ADH environmental specialists make sure septic tank systems are installed correctly to help protect watersheds. We also work with other agencies to protect these watersheds and inspect water plants to make sure the sources of drinking water are safe. All these activities contribute to the purity of our public and private water supplies. Our colleagues also build public confidence in the drinking water by contributing to consumer confidence reports and providing annual compliance reports.

That is some of what ADH does to safeguard the drinking water. You can do your part by using water wisely and by minimizing contamination.

Here are some suggestions:

- Use low-flow fixtures. An inexpensive low-flow aerator is simple to install on your showerhead and kitchen and bathroom faucets.
- Check for leaks. Visit the American Water Works Association Waterwiser web site at www.waterwiser.org for more information and to use their drip calculator to see how much water you might be wasting.
- Fill a plastic bottle with water, seal the lid and drop it in your toilet tank. This saves water when you flush.
- Dispose of toxic chemicals properly. Don't pour them down your drain.
- Water your lawn early in the morning or at night to avoid excess evaporation.

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- Use lawn chemicals only when necessary.
- Use phosphate-free detergents to save our lakes and streams.
- Wait until you have a full load to run the dishwasher and washing machine.
- Don't let the water run while brushing your teeth and washing dishes.
- Dispose of used motor oil properly. One quart of motor oil can contaminate more than 250,000 gallons of water.

For more than 50 years, ADH has been a member of the American Water Works Association, helping their efforts to improve the quality of the nation's drinking water; the science and technology used in collecting, treating and distributing water; and the level of professionalism of water operators and managers. This organization, along with other drinking water organizations such as the National Rural Water Association and the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, work to increase public awareness and involvement in public and private drinking water issues.

I know you join me in thanking all those who work long and hard to ensure the safety of our drinking water. They provide healthier and happier lifestyles for us all. For more information about safe drinking water, contact Harold Seifert, ADH Engineering Division, at 1-800-482-5400 ext. 2654 or visit our website at www.healthyarkansas.com/eng/conservetips.htm. You can also access information at EPA's website at www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency/index.htm.

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