

What are you drinking?

Do you know what is in your tap water? Much attention is being paid to current and potential groundwater contaminants. In farm country, fertilizers and manure contribute most of the contaminants that pollute our waterways. Before you rush out and buy truckloads of bottled water (which usually is not as sparkling and as pure as it claims), you may want to consider having your water tested for a variety of pollutants. Generally you cannot predict the quality of your water by looking at or even by drinking it.

The most frequent tests done in this county are for the following contaminants: lead, nitrates, nitrites, and bacteria. Lead pollution is most likely if old lead pipes were used as the water main. It is also possible to have high lead levels in the groundwater. Nitrates and nitrites come from fertilizers and manure as they are washed off fields and roads. High levels of bacteria can result from a variety of sources. Generally it is a problem if the well has been contaminated.

Testing can be done by yourself or by a qualified laboratory. I recommend taking, or having an inspector collect, samples to a qualified lab. These labs require specific collection techniques and guidelines to ensure quality results. Unfortunately, these labs are few and far between. There are labs in Fort Wayne and Mishawaka that I have frequently used that employ stringent standards to ensure quality control. You can also buy test kits that will give you a general idea, but not specific numbers. For example, it may indicate a “low” or “high” reading, but would require further testing to pinpoint the level.

Correcting any problems can be easy or costly. Chlorinating a well will usually take care of any bacteria problems. Installing a reverse osmosis system takes care of a variety of contaminants and usually improves the taste. However, they are expensive (high quality systems can cost \$800-\$1200) and somewhat costly to maintain.

One common issue with water is a strong sulfur smell when the water is running. This does not necessarily mean the water is contaminated. Generally this problem is caused by the well water’s reaction with the magnesium anode rod in the water heater. The only way to solve this problem is by removing the rod from the water heater. Your water heater will still operate properly if removed correctly.