

IRON IN YOUR WELL WATER

Tips to Protect Your Well Water



Private wells can provide a clean, safe source of water if they are properly located, built, and maintained. As a private well owner, it is your responsibility to make sure that your water is safe to use by testing for contaminants. This brochure provides information on iron and helps you understand the possible problems you may encounter with high levels of iron in your drinking water.

WHAT ARE THE FORMS OF IRON?

The forms of iron are soluble, insoluble, and organic. **Soluble iron**, also known as “clear water,” causes reddish brown particles that will settle at the bottom of a glass of water.

Insoluble iron, also known as “red water,” gives water a rusty, red or yellow color.

Organic iron is formed from organic acid and iron and is typically yellow or brown in color, but it can be clear. There are also organisms that eat iron known as iron bacteria. Iron bacteria create a “biofilm” that is a red or brown slime (typically the slime is in the toilet tank and in plumbing materials) and can make an iron problem even worse.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH CONCERNS?

Iron in well water is usually not a health concern. However, iron can cause other problems such as leaving stains on laundry and dishes. Iron can also give water a metallic taste or a bad smell.

HOW MUCH IRON CAUSES A PROBLEM?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set a secondary maximum contaminant level (SMCL) for iron at 0.3 milligrams per liter of water (mg/L). The SMCL is used as a guideline to assist the public in determining

WHAT IS IRON?

Iron is a mineral that is naturally-occurring. Our bodies need iron for many bodily functions. For example iron is needed in blood to carry oxygen from our lungs to the rest of the body.

the level that may cause problems such as a rusty color and/or metallic taste in water, or reddish or orange staining.

WHAT CAN I DO TO REMOVE IRON FROM MY WATER?

The form of iron you have will determine the type of treatment that you use. Currently, there are no NSF International certified treatment devices for iron; however, there are methods that can be used to reduce the amount of iron in your water. Soluble and organic iron can be treated with methods such as a water softener, ozonation or various types of filtration. Methods such as oxidation and filtration can be used to remove insoluble iron from water. Iron bacteria is typically treated by shock chlorination. To determine the best method for removing iron from your well, call the NSF International Consumer Hotline at 1-800-673-8010.



HEALTH DISTRICT CONTACT INFORMATION

Panhandle Health District

208-415-5200

www.phd1.idaho.gov

(serving Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Shoshone counties)

North Central Health District

208-799-3100

www.idahopublichealth.com

(serving Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, and Nez Perce counties)

Southwest District Health

208-455-5400

www.publichealthidaho.com

(serving Adams, Canyon, Gem, Owyhee, Payette and Washington counties)

Central District Health

208-375-5211

www.cdhd.idaho.gov

(serving Ada, Boise, Elmore and Valley counties)

South Central Public Health District

208-737-5900

www.phd5.idaho.gov

(serving Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls counties)

Southeastern Idaho Public Health

208-233-9080

www.sdhdidaho.org

(serving Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Butte, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida, and Power counties)

Eastern Idaho Public Health District

208-522-0310

www.phd7.idaho.gov

(serving Bonneville, Clark, Custer, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, Madison, and Teton counties)

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Licensed Well Drillers

www.idwr.idaho.gov/apps/well/licensedwelldrillers/

Ground Water Protection Section

Boise: 208-287-4800

www.idwr.idaho.gov

Northern Region, Coeur d'Alene: 208-769-1450

Eastern Region, Idaho Falls: 208-525-7161

Southern Region, Twin Falls: 208-736-3033

Western Region, Boise: 208-334-2190

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Water Program

Boise Office 208-332-8597

www.agri.state.id.us

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

Bureau of Community and Environmental Health

1-866-240-3553

www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov

bceh@dhw.idaho.gov

Idaho Bureau of Laboratories

208-334-2235

www.statelab.idaho.gov

statelab@dhw.idaho.gov

NSF INTERNATIONAL

Consumer Hotline 1-800-673-8010

www.nsf.org

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAINTAIN MY WATER SYSTEM?

If you install a treatment device, follow the manufacturer's suggested maintenance schedule to be sure your water is safe. Also, your well should be maintained to keep it in good working order. To help keep track of well maintenance, it is recommended that you create and maintain a "system maintenance log." The log should include the location of the well, construction and contractor details, as well as results of any water tests. A copy of a log is available by calling the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare at 1-866-240-3553. For questions about your well water, contact your local public health district.

SUGGESTED TESTING SCHEDULE

The table below shows how often you should test your well for contaminants.

Contaminants	How often should I test?
Arsenic Uranium Fluoride	Once every 3 to 5 years
Bacteria Nitrate	Once a Year