

## Environmental Health Services



The Cuyahoga County Board of Health can provide a private water system evaluation for a fee of \$75.00, which includes sampling for bacteria and a nitrate pre-screening test. This fee includes a re-sample, if necessary. In addition to determining the water quality of your system, the evaluation can identify obvious structural or environmental problems. The CCBH can also explain the proper remediation procedures for any problems that are found. Contact us if you have any questions regarding your private water system or would like to have your well inspected and sampled.

Further information is available from the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, Environmental Health Services, at (216) 201-2020, weekdays between 8:30a.m. and 4:30p.m., or on our website at [www.ccbh.net](http://www.ccbh.net).



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Northeast Ohio Public Health Partnership**

Cuyahoga County Board of Health

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## A Homeowner's Guide to Private Water Systems



**Protecting and  
Promoting the Health of  
the Residents of  
Cuyahoga County**

**(216) 201-2000  
[www.ccbh.net](http://www.ccbh.net)**

## **Potable Water**

What is potable water? Potable water is defined in the Ohio Administrative Code as water that is satisfactory for drinking, culinary, or other domestic uses. Although many Cuyahoga County residents live within a public water system, or “city water” grid, some must seek private sources for potable water. This brochure highlights the two most common private water systems and some easy steps you can take to ensure they provide a safe source of potable water.

The consequences of drinking contaminated water can range from mild discomfort to severe chronic illness. To avoid any health risks from a private water system, you should first become familiar with your water system type and know the maintenance associated with it.



## **Water Wells**

Most residents use wells as their private water source. The well is constructed following a specific sanitary procedure to prevent groundwater contamination. It relies on the natural filtration properties in soil and bedrock, and generally requires no continuous chemical disinfection. Wells do not need much maintenance, although some wells may be prone to contamination. The potential for contamination depends on the construction of the well and soil characteristics.



## **Cisterns**

In some areas of the County, poor ground water quality or quantity has forced residents to utilize cisterns as alternative private water sources. Cisterns collect rainwater from rooftops, which is then filtered and chemically disinfected to provide safe water at the tap.

Because cisterns require continuous chemical disinfection, an adequate and continuous supply of the chemical used, commonly chlorine or iodine, must be available and routinely checked to make sure that minimum disinfection levels are sustained. It is important that all special filtration or disinfection devices receive proper maintenance. Cisterns and holding tanks should also be periodically drained, cleaned, and sanitized. It is a good idea to have all private water systems sampled annually to determine if they are providing safe drinking water.



## **Sources of Contamination**

Although your water may look fine, there are possible water contaminants that cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted. Sources of contamination include chemicals such as pesticides and fuels, as well as bacterial contamination from septic systems and animal wastes. It is important to store all chemicals and animal/pet waste away from your water system, and to properly maintain your septic system.

It is also very important to regularly inspect your water system for signs of contamination and deterioration. The well cap should fit firmly with the casing and should not be cracked or damaged. Cracks or holes within the casing, or casing that moves or is dislodged, can lead to infiltration of contaminants. Hearing running water from within the casing may also signal a problem that may require professional assistance.

## **Well Water Disinfection**

To properly disinfect your well, regular unscented household bleach should be used and the following steps should be performed:

- Remove the well cap, vent pipe, or plug if the well is equipped with a sanitary well seal.
- Pour 1 gallon of unscented bleach (5.25%) directly into the well.
- Connect a hose to the nearest faucet/spigot and run water until a chlorine odor is smelled. Continue running water for at least 15 minutes.
- Shut off the water to the hose and open every faucet, both hot and cold, in the home and run water at each faucet until a chlorine odor is smelled.
- Shut off all faucets and pour another 1 gallon of unscented bleach directly into the well. Replace the well cap/pipe/plug and allow the chlorinated water to stand in the system for at least 12 hours.
- Run water from all faucets until a chlorine odor can no longer be smelled. Disinfection should now be complete.