



# analyzing drinking water: knowing your risks

It wasn't long ago that drinking water was literally taken for granted in North America. But over the past few years there have been significant concerns about its quality, and many consumers are now seeking alternate sources. The growing use of bottled water from alternate sources has spawned additional environmental concerns, yet most consumers tend to continue to worry most about their own water first. Accordingly, here are some things to consider about our most common sources of drinking water.

## **Municipally Treated Systems**

Most people in urban North America rely on a municipal water system. Generally speaking, these public systems are safe. However, some have come under closer scrutiny recently due to concerns over monitoring methods and purification procedures. In addition, there are also concerns in older communities about hazardous lead water mains. Lead that has leached into the water system poses a real danger, especially to children and the elderly. In such cases, residents are urged to insist that standards be upgraded and lead pipes be scheduled for replacement. You need to be sure your municipal water facility is reliable, regulated and frequently tested. If not, have your tap water tested for lead and other contaminants, according to public health criteria. If the results are poor, you may consider having your water treated at the faucet, or replaced with bottled water, until you are confident your local system is safe.

## **Private and Community Wells**

In more rural areas, many depend upon a dedicated single home or shared community well. These wells are often regulated by local laws based on their usage. Some wells are dug, but drilled wells are

deeper, more reliable, and often mandatory because they benefit from more extensive natural filtering of ground water. Such wells are cost efficient but they must be tested frequently according to public health guidelines and/or legislation, since they may be subject to contamination by animals, run-off or leaching.

## **Bottled and Delivered Water**

In reaction to quality concerns, and also for convenience, many people accept paying for bottled water. But there is now a groundswell against bottled water because of the environmental cost of shipping and disposing of the bottles as well as growing litter problems. In fact, some trendy restaurants are now touting the fact that they serve only filtered tap water. In addition, there is mounting evidence that some inferior plastic containers actually leach chemicals into their contents over time, so refilling these bottles is not advised.

Whether delivered in bulk or purchased individually, bottled water is not a viable long-term solution for quality drinking water. Testing is varied, and often unregulated or inconsistent across jurisdictions. In addition, most bottled water is not legally required to be fluoridated, and the new trend of adding vitamins is not considered significantly beneficial. Simply put, bottled water is costly on many levels, especially when purchased in personal-use sizes.

Ultimately, we all have reason to be concerned about the true cost of accessing safe drinking water with minimal environmental disturbance. If you have any doubt about the quality of your drinking water, have it tested regularly. If it is not within prescribed guidelines, find an alternate source or treatment. For example, consider using a filtration unit that is guaranteed to remove the contaminants in question, until you have a satisfactory long-term solution.