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## Private Water Systems Course

### Lesson 4

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#### Frequently Asked Questions

***What should I test my water for?***

It would cost thousands of dollars to have your water tested for everything that a laboratory offers. It would also be completely unnecessary since most private water supplies only have a handful of contaminants that are potential threats. In general, it is recommended that all private water system owners have their water tested for total coliform bacteria every year. Every two or three years, the homeowner should add a pH and total dissolved solids (TDS) test because these tests will help you monitor your water quality over time. Besides those tests, other tests can be added based on obvious symptoms to your drinking water or based on local landuse practices that could impact your water supply. If you need help determining what to test your water for, contact your county Extension Educator and ask them for assistance.

***Where should I get my water testing done?***

All water testing for private water systems should be done by a state certified water testing laboratory. Decisions about your water system should never be made based on testing done from a water treatment vendor or using a home water testing kit. For private water systems, testing can be done at a regional DEP office, at a privately owned state certified lab within your county

([http://www.depweb.state.pa.us/labs/lib/labs/alis\\_aams\\_labs\\_fot.pdf](http://www.depweb.state.pa.us/labs/lib/labs/alis_aams_labs_fot.pdf)), or at the Penn State University Ag Analytical Laboratory ([http://www.aasl.psu.edu/waterprogram\\_main.html](http://www.aasl.psu.edu/waterprogram_main.html)).

Contact your local Cooperative Extension Office to find certified testing facilities in your local area.

***How do I interpret my water test analysis report?***

After doing the hard part of having your water tested, it can be frustrating to receive a complicated and unclear report from the water testing laboratory. Every water lab has its own reporting format so it is difficult to generalize

about how to interpret a report. However, the most important items to identify on any test report are the columns that tell you what your test result indicated and that identifies what the state drinking water standard is for that specific contaminant. Once you identify those two columns, you can compare them to see if your water exceeded any of those standards. Occasionally, labs will throw in other columns such as "detection level" or "analysis method", but the only things you really need to compare are your result and the drinking water standard. When interpreting a report, make sure to take note of the units displayed for each parameter since water labs may report the results in different ways

***When buying a house should one test the water for lead and copper?***

This would be an excellent idea. Lead base solder was banned in 1991, so homes built before this date may have lead in the solder that joins the copper pipes together or older homes may even have lead pipes. You can also check the sinks in the house to look for blue-green stains which is the copper being deposited in the sinks. Be careful on the timing, because someone may be doing their own home repairs and mistakenly using lead base solder.

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