Did You Know?

- Half of all Americans use groundwater for drinking water supplies.

- Of all the earth's water that's useable by humans, 98% is groundwater.

- Groundwater – its depth from the surface, quality for drinking water, and chance of being polluted – varies from place to place. Generally, the deeper the well, the better the groundwater. The amount of new water flowing into the area also affects groundwater quality.

- Groundwater may contain some natural impurities or contaminants, even with no human activity or pollution. Natural contaminants can come from many conditions in the watershed or in the ground.

- Water moving through underground rocks and soils may pick up magnesium, calcium and chlorides.

- Some groundwater naturally contains dissolved elements such as arsenic, boron, selenium, or radon, a gas formed by the natural breakdown of radioactive uranium in the soil. Whether these natural contaminants are health problems depends on the amount of the substance present.

- In addition to natural contaminants, groundwater is often polluted by human activities such as:
    - Improper use of fertilizers, animal manures, herbicides, insecticides, and pesticides
    - Improperly built or poorly located and/or maintained septic systems for household wastewater
    - Leaking or abandoned underground storage tanks or piping
    - Storm water drains that discharge chemicals to groundwater
    - Improper disposal or storage of wastes
    - Chemical spills at local industrial sites

- More than 17 million households in the United States use individual wells to supply water for their families. Wells are used to extract water from aquifers.

- Most U.S. groundwater is safe for human use. However, groundwater contamination has been found in all 50 states, so well owners have reason to be vigilant in protecting their water supplies.

- The Safe Drinking Water Act does not protect private wells.

- The risk of having problems depends on how good your well is – how well it was built and located, and how well you maintain it. It also depends on your local environment. That includes the quality of the aquifer from which you draw your water and the human activities going on in your area that can affect your well water.

- What is poured on the ground today can end up in our drinking water many years later.

- Basic tests can determine if bacteria and nitrates are present in well water. More sophisticated and expensive tests are required to detect pesticides and chemicals.

- Most private well owners occasionally test for bacteria, but rarely, if ever, test for anything else. Generally, people test their water only when it tastes funny or smells bad.

This information was compiled from a number of sources, including the United States Environmental Protection Agency, The Groundwater Foundation and others.

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