

August 15, 2016

Health Unit Urges Well Owners to Test Their Water and Conserve Water During Continuing Drought Conditions

With many of our conservation authorities declaring moderate to severe drought conditions across Leeds, Grenville and Lanark Counties, the Health Unit would like to inform well owners of risks to their well water supply. **During times of prolonged drought, wells can be susceptible to contamination due to varying water levels.** As water levels in the water table drop, some wells may draw contaminants from further away into your drinking water supply. In addition, soil may compact and pull away from well casings making them vulnerable to runoff when it does rain. In times of drought, well owners may notice changes in their water supply including quality and quantity.

All private well owners are urged to sample their wells to ensure the bacteriological quality of their water has not changed. Water testing bottles are available at any of our Health Unit offices as well as other sites within the tri-county area including many municipal offices. Filled bottles can be returned to any Health Unit office or designated drop off site – check our web site for locations www.healthunit.org. **Testing is free.** Should your sample results indicate poor bacteriological quality, boil the water at a rolling boil for one minute and then cool and store safely for use. While disinfection of contaminated wells is often recommended; during drought conditions this process (which requires flushing) may result in your well running dry. Call the Health Unit to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this procedure.

It can take a considerable amount of time for wells to recover from persistent lack of precipitation. Well owners are encouraged to conserve water before wells start to be problematic, and to consider alternate safe sources of water available in the event that there is a shortage of water from the well.

Ways in which you can reduce your water usage are:

- Flush toilets only when necessary as toilets can account for 24% of typical use in a home
- Take shorter showers as showers account for 20% of typical use in a home
- Fix leaks, dripping faucets and running toilets as these can account for 12-19% of water usage
- Ensure when washing clothes your load is full as this can account for 17 % of water usage
- Don't water lawns, wash cars, driveways etc.
- Use water collected in your dehumidifier to water plants etc.
- Avoid use of your dishwasher or ensure it is full before use

(Information provided by the CRCA source: Water Research Foundation)

<http://www.waterrf.org/PublicReportLibrary/4309A.pdf>

Should your well stop providing water, **do not** pour surface water into your well as this can contaminate the water supply with bacteria, parasites and possibly chemical contaminants that can be difficult to remove. Removing your well cap to check water levels frequently, or lowering measuring devices into your well can lead to contamination and is not recommended.

For more information on what you can do to protect your well water supply and to check the status of drought conditions in your watershed please check the following links to our partner agencies:

- Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/drinking-water>
- Conservation Authorities: Cataraqui Conservation Authority: <http://crca.ca/>
- Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority: <http://mvc.on.ca/>
- Rideau Valley Conservation Authority: <http://www.rvca.ca/>
- South Nation Conservation Authority: <http://www.nation.on.ca/>

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**Contact: Joan Mays, Manager of Community Health Protection 613-345-5685 or 1-800-660-5853
or Susan Healey, Communications Co-ordinator 613-802-0550**