

Safe Drinking Water for our Schools

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Division of Environmental Health, Drinking Water and Wastewater Program has the responsibility for public health protection by ensuring compliance with the state drinking water regulations for Public Water Systems (PWS). These regulations are required by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and associated amendments.

What is a Public Water System? They are systems that provide water to consumers, and are not a private well. A class "A" PWS serves at least 25 individuals or 15 service connections year round, or serves the same 25 individuals for at least 6 months a year. A class "B" PWS is a system that regularly serves at least 25 individuals each day for at least 60 days a year.

Why do we need the regulations? The drinking water regulations set the standards for safe drinking water, they identify contaminants and the allowable level of contaminants in the water that are, or could be, harmful for those who drink the water. Children are particularly sensitive to environmental pollutants. Pound for pound children eat more food, drink more water and breathe more air than adults do.

What type of contaminants do we regulate? Examples include:

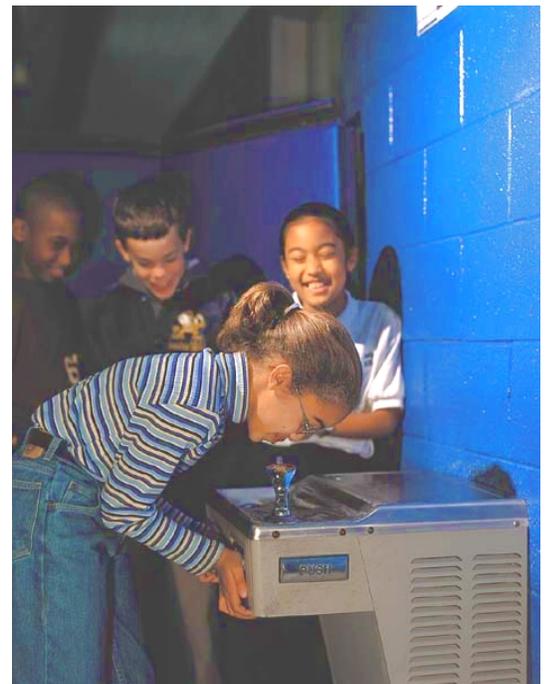
- Bacteria and Viruses (from septic systems and sewage etc)
- Lead and Copper
- Nitrate and Nitrite
- Heavy Metals like arsenic, cadmium, barium, and cyanide
- Volatile Organic Contaminants (VOC) like benzene and gasoline
- Synthetic Organic Contaminants (SOC) like pesticides and herbicides
- Other Organic Contaminants (OOC) like Dioxin and PCBs

How do these contaminants effect us? Exposure come from many sources, drinking water is one of them. Studies demonstrate that a variety of chemicals and contaminates commonly encountered in homes and schools can contribute to health and developmental disorders. Consuming water containing contaminants above the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) set by the regulations over a period of time can cause health problems.

How does that involve schools and our kids? Schools are either supplied water by the community PWS or they have their own drinking water supply and are a PWS themselves. ADEC is currently working on a project to increase the compliance rate of schools that have their own PWS, with the state drinking water regulations.

Why does ADEC want to increase compliance?

Ultimately, for public health protection. Like all parents, teachers, and concerned individuals, ADEC feels a strong responsibility to our children. ADEC feels not only do we have a responsibility to ensure our children learn what they need in school to become a functioning part of our society, but they should be taught in a safe environment to ensure they are healthy when they leave their schools.



What can you do? First ask yourself this - "Are your kids drinking safe water in schools?"

If you don't know the answer to this you need to get involved. Ask your child's school if they are on their own PWS or get the name of the PWS that supplies the water to the school. Ask if they've had any violations during the previous year.

If you are the PWS operator ask yourself if you're doing the best job you can be doing. If not, why not? Is there something DEC staff can do to help you do a better job? If so let us know. If the school can help you do a better job, let them know!

If you are a school district or Dept. of Education employee, do what you can to make sure the PWS operator has the resources they need to do the job, OR, if the schools water is supplied by another PWS, make sure it is adequate. You are paying for a service, make sure you are getting what you pay for.

You may contact ADEC for further information:

Anchorage - 269-7656

Fairbanks - 451-2108

Juneau - 465-5350

Soldotna - 262-5210

Wasilla - 376-5038

For more information on the "Safe Drinking Water in our Schools" Project, please contact Kathy Kastens, ADEC Project Coordinator, at 269-7639.

Websites for ADEC and EPA:

<http://www.state.ak.us/dec/deh/water/>

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/>

EPA Educational Websites for teachers and students:

<Http://www.epa.gov/teachers/>

<Http://www.epa.gov/students/>

<Http://www.epa.gov/safewater/kids/other.html>

Children may be more susceptible to chemical contaminants that affect learning, motor skills, and hormones, during important stages of growth.

Safe Water - Drink it for Life !!