

What to Do If You Suspect Drinking Water Contamination from Utility Poles

This document is intended as a guide for Vermonters to follow in the event you suspect that your drinking water has been contaminated by utility pole preservatives. ***It is important to note that this is very rare occurrence and only a few cases have ever been documented in Vermont.*** Additionally, poles that have been in service for several years and have had no recent excavation are less likely to create any issues. However, if you suspect there is an issue with your water supply or if there has been recent installation or replacement of utilities poles or excavation of soil within a few feet of existing utility poles near your water supply, please follow the steps outlined below.

What kinds of water sources are most at risk? Shallow drinking water sources, such as springs and dug wells, are most likely to be influenced by contaminants moving from utility poles, and other contaminants.

What are signs to look out for?

- Look for a utility pole that appears to be “sweating,” or there is more than 12 inches of stained soil around the base of the pole on the soil, especially if it is very close to your water supply
- Gas or diesel-like odors coming from your water
- Note that health and environmental limits are lower than our ability to smell it: you may not be able to smell the contamination in your drinking water.

What should you do? If you suspect your water may be contaminated, do not drink or bathe in it until the situation can be assessed. Use a known safe source of water for these activities. Boiling the water will not remove these contaminants.

Who should you contact? Call the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Spill Response hotline during **office hours 1-802-828-1138** or **24 hour at 1-800-641-5005**. Staff members are trained to respond and will work with you to identify the next steps, which will include identifying and notifying the utility that owns the pole. Provide all parties with your name, address and the pole number located on the pole.

What will they test for? If it is determined to be necessary, state agencies and your utility will arrange for collection and testing of water samples for contaminants related to the wood preservatives in the pole. Based on the location and other characteristics of your water supply, the Department of Health may advise you to test for other contaminants as well.

Who will test the water? Only certified laboratories can test drinking water. A list of the Vermont-certified laboratories can be found here:

http://healthvermont.gov/enviro/ph_lab/documents/certified_labs.pdf

or ask the state agency that you are working with for a list of certified laboratories near you.

What will happen if the water is contaminated? The staff at the state agencies and your utility will work with you to come up with a remediation plan to fix the situation.

