

How Safe Is Your Water Supply?

Having a private water supply can be a real boon. Cheaper than mains water, control over chemical additives and often with better pressure, a private supply is also not subject to imposed drought restrictions. Many farms, businesses and homes rely on a private supply either through preference or practicality. Indeed, the South West has around one third of all the private supplies in England. Cool, fresh and delicious - spring water on tap can be one of the perks of rural living.

The quality of private water supplies, however, can be extremely variable. It's vital to ensure the safety of your supply for yourself, your guests, livestock or customers. In fact, it's a legal requirement if you run a commercial activity where you supply water to your customers, such as a campsite, B&B or rental property. Owners can help safeguard their supplies by protecting from contamination by livestock and other hazards, installing treatment apparatus, and making sure the water is stored and distributed safely before use.

Private water supplies often pose a health risk because they are not managed or tested in the same way as public supplies. Common problems include bacteria, heavy metals such as iron, manganese, aluminium, lead and arsenic, as well as nitrates, nitrites, ammonia and other minerals. Sometimes the contamination may affect the appearance, taste or smell of the water but it is often not obvious. The best way to be sure your supply is fit for use is to have regular testing carried out.

Professional testing should include metals such as iron, zinc, lead, nickel and copper that may result from deteriorating pipework or other sources. It should also report on chemical levels from disinfection products. The key benefit of engaging a reputable professional laboratory is that they can provide microbiological testing which will identify health hazards such as E.coli. Not all labs offer this service, so always check what is included when choosing a company. It is highly recommended that a laboratory accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) is used rather than internet testing kits which are very unreliable and often give misleading results.

Somerset Scientific Services, part of Somerset County Council, have been supplying impartial advice and testing for over 50 years. Contact them for information or a quote for a comprehensive UKAS accredited testing package.

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