

Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP)

FAST FACTS

Lebanon groundwater contamination**Background:**

In 1990, the city of Lebanon began looking for a new source of water to add to the city's water supply. When they tested the groundwater in Lebanon's Century Park to see if it was safe to drink, they found it was contaminated with chemicals known as volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The VOCs found in Lebanon's groundwater that are of most concern are trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE). These are solvents used in dry cleaning and engine degreasing.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) tested more than 100 residential wells between 1993 and 2008 and identified several sources of contamination where cleanup actions have been started.

In 2007, DEQ asked the Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP) to independently examine the data to determine if the contamination could harm people's health.

EHAP determined that groundwater in certain areas of Lebanon contains potentially unsafe levels of PCE and TCE. If residents in those areas are using the contaminated water for drinking, cooking and bathing, it could pose a health risk.

DEQ identified some wells above the safe drinking water standard of 5 parts per billion (ppb). Those residents are currently being given bottled water for drinking, which reduces potential health risks.

However, not all well owners in the area have had their wells tested, and some people could be exposed to unsafe levels of PCE and TCE in their water. **EHAP strongly encourages well owners within DEQ's study area to get their well water tested.**

Important facts about TCE and PCE

- At very high levels, exposure to PCE and TCE can cause serious health problems, including an increased risk for some cancers. Children may be especially vulnerable because of their smaller size and their developing bodies and brains.
- If your well is contaminated with PCE or TCE, you can be exposed by drinking the water. You can also be exposed by inhaling vapors that escape from water during activities such as showering or cooking.

What is being done about this problem?

DEQ is providing free well-water testing to anyone living in the area that is roughly bounded by Mary Street to the north, D Street to the south, Hiatt Street to the east, and 10th Street to the west. If you live in this area and haven't had your well tested, **please call 541-687-7349 for a free test.**

EHAP recommends that water with PCE and TCE levels above the safe drinking water standard not be used for drinking, cooking or showering. In the short term, DEQ is providing bottled water to people whose wells are above the drinking water standard of 5 ppb.

As a long-term solution, DEQ plans to offer to hook these homeowners' wells up to the city water supply free of charge, which will provide a safe and reliable water supply (for all uses) for the entire home. The homeowner would be responsible for the monthly water bills. If Lebanon residents qualify for energy assistance, they can receive 10 percent off their monthly water bills.

Additional steps you can take to protect your family's health:

- Having your well tested is the first step toward making sure your family's health is not at risk from the contaminated water.

If your water has PCE or TCE above the safe drinking water standard:

- Stop drinking the water, and contact DEQ to arrange for a safe drinking water supply.

You can also protect your family by:

- ▶ Ventilating bathrooms, washrooms and kitchens during and after using hot water. VOCs are more likely to evaporate into the air you breathe when the water is hot.
- ▶ Taking a bath instead of a shower.
- ▶ Waiting for a half-hour after the bath is drawn before bathing.
- ▶ Washing your clothes and dishes in cooler water.
- ▶ Using less water. If you shower, take shorter, cooler showers.
- ▶ Using shorter wash cycles for dishes and clothes.

Where to go for more information:

EHAP's full report can be found online at www.healthoregon.org/ehap

For questions about health effects, call Sujata Joshi at 971-673-1213.

For questions about well-water testing, call Don Hanson at 541-687-7349.