



FACT SHEET

Connecticut Department of Public Health
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[CT Department of Public Health](#)

April 2024

What You Need to Know About: **Tetrachloroethylene in Private Well Water**

Tetrachloroethylene is found in some public and private groundwater drinking water wells in Connecticut. The US Environmental Protection Agency requires regular testing for this chemical in public water systems. Private wells can also have tetrachloroethylene, but testing in these wells must usually be done by the well owner.

This fact sheet addresses health concerns and treatment questions about tetrachloroethylene in private well water. For more information, please see the contact information at the end of this document.

What is Tetrachloroethylene?

Tetrachloroethylene, also known as perchloroethylene, PCE, PERC, and tetrachloroethene, is a chemical that is widely used for dry cleaning of fabrics and for metal-degreasing. This chemical can get into well water when groundwater comes in contact with a spill or other release to the environment. Tetrachloroethylene is one of the more common non-natural chemicals found in Connecticut's groundwater.

What is the Hazard Associated with Tetrachloroethylene in Drinking Water?

Tetrachloroethylene has caused liver and kidney damage and cancer in animals exposed to high levels. Based on these facts, tetrachloroethylene is believed to probably cause cancer in people. Drinking water that has tetrachloroethylene may increase a person's risk of cancer. However, it is unlikely that the levels of tetrachloroethylene typically found in drinking water would be harmful to your health over a short period of time.

How Might I Be Exposed to Tetrachloroethylene from My Well Water?

Tetrachloroethylene evaporates easily from water, so in addition to taking it into your body through drinking, you may also be exposed to a large amount from breathing the air inside your home. Tetrachloroethylene gets into indoor air from appliances that use water (such as dishwashers and washing machines) and from the shower. Your body may also absorb it through the skin during a bath or shower. A simple way to absorb less is to turn on a bathroom fan while bathing or showering. This can prevent the buildup of tetrachloroethylene in the bathroom air.

Is There a Safe Level of Tetrachloroethylene in Drinking Water?

The CT Department of Public Health (CT DPH) has set an Action Level for tetrachloroethylene of 5 micrograms per liter (ug/L). An Action Level is a state guideline for a chemical in private well water. The Action Level for private well water is the same as the US EPA maximum containment level (MCL) for tetrachloroethylene in public drinking water. An MCL is a federal, enforceable drinking water standard for public water. If your well water has tetrachloroethylene at a concentration greater than the Action Level of 5 ug/L, you should stop drinking your water and using it for cooking until you can install a treatment system to remove the tetrachloroethylene. Action Levels are set well below the level that causes health effects in people or animals. So if you have tetrachloroethylene in your well water at a level above the Action Level, it is still probably at a level lower than what is harmful to your health. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to avoid drinking and cooking with water that has tetrachloroethylene at levels above the Action Level to reduce any chance for harm to your health.

What About Bathing and Showering?

Since you can inhale tetrachloroethylene and absorb it through the skin while bathing and showering, it is important to prevent these exposures as well. If the tetrachloroethylene level in your well water is greater than 50 ug/L (ten times greater than the Action Level), you should avoid bathing and showering until you can install a whole house treatment system to remove the tetrachloroethylene from all of the water you use in your home.

How Can I Find Out if There is a Problem with My Drinking Water?

The best way is to have your well water tested by a [state-certified water testing lab](#). You can also call the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) or your local health department and ask if they are aware of a contamination problem in your neighborhood.

What Can Be Done if a Private Well Has Tetrachloroethylene?

If tests show that your well has tetrachloroethylene you should call CT DEEP or your local health department to report the problem. They may investigate to find the source of the contamination. If the levels are above the Action Level of 5 ug/L, you will need a treatment system to remove the tetrachloroethylene from the water. Contact the CT DPH Private Well Program to discuss water treatment options.

Whom Can I Contact for More Information?

Health & Treatment Questions

CT Dept. of Public Health
Environmental Health Section
860- 509-7740 - Health Questions
860-509-8401 - Treatment Questions
CT DPH [Private Well Program](#)

Report Contamination:

CT Dept. of Energy and
Environmental Protection
860-424-3705
Your [Local Health Department](#)

Water Testing Laboratories:

[List of State Certified Labs](#)