

Potential Threats to the Safety of Our Drinking Water

This is the third in a series of articles written on local drinking water sources and the Source Water Protection Program being implemented by the City of Rosenberg.

One of the most basic needs of any community is safe and clean drinking water. That's why the City of Rosenberg and other communities throughout the region have joined in on a group effort to develop and implement a local Source Water Protection Program. Instead of remediation, added chemical treatment, and investment in new technologies after a contamination event, *protecting the source* from contamination can be much more cost effective. If harmful pathogens and chemicals are kept out of the aquifers, lakes, and rivers that we use as drinking water then the risk to human health is lowered significantly. This first barrier – source water protection – is not the only barrier to safeguard human health against waterborne contaminant threats. Yet it is an important first step that can save money and decrease risks to human health.

As individual citizens, we all have an important role to play in the protection of our drinking water. Protecting our drinking water begins at home. How do your personal habits affect our drinking water? The first question to ask yourself is “Where does your drinking water come from?” While it does come from the faucet, the actual answer is the Gulf Coast Aquifer.

You may be surprised to learn that the way we dispose of products we use in our home or farm can contribute to the contamination of our community's drinking water. You may

be even more surprised to learn that a number of the products we use at home contain hazardous or toxic substances.

The truth is, products like motor oil, pesticides, left-over paints or paint cans, flea collars, weed killers, household cleaners, and even a number of medicines contain materials that can be harmful to our drinking water.

The average American disposes of approximately one pound of this type of waste each year. Although the amount of any of these substances that you pour down your drain, put in your trash, or dump on the ground or into a lake may seem insignificant to you, try multiplying it by the number of people in the surrounding cities and towns.

Don't Pour It Down the Drain! Anything you pour down your drain or flush down your toilet will enter your septic system or your community's sewer system. Using this method to dispose of products that contain harmful substances can affect your septic system's ability to treat human wastes.

Once out of sight, these harmful substances can eventually contaminate both ground and surface water. In addition, most community wastewater treatment plants are not designed to treat many of these substances. Thus, they can eventually be discharged into surface water and cause contamination.

Don't Put It in the Trash! In general, community landfills are also not equipped to handle hazardous materials. As rain passes through the landfill, the water can become contaminated by these products and eventually carry them into the groundwater and surface water.

Don't Dump It on the Ground! Hazardous wastes that are dumped on or buried in the ground can contaminate the soil and either leach down into the groundwater or be carried into a nearby body of surface water by runoff during rainstorms.

What Can I Do? Get informed and get involved! Communities can make a difference. If you think one person can't change the system, help form a group. You, alone or as a part of a group, can help educate your family, friends, and neighbors about the importance of safe drinking water in your community.

Those interested in learning more can contact the City of Rosenberg at (832) 595-3500.