

Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP)

FAST FACTS

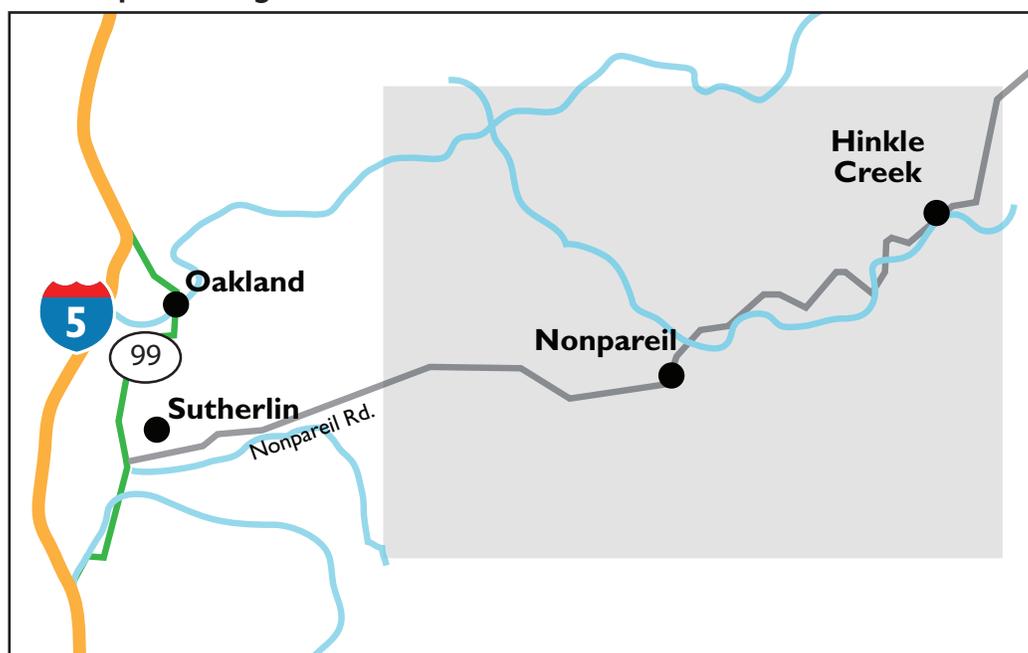
Sutherlin Valley private wells:**High levels of arsenic found in some area well water****Background**

A report issued in July 2009 recommends that residents in the Sutherlin Valley test their private wells for arsenic. This recommendation follows testing completed in the summer of 2008 of more than 100 Sutherlin Valley area wells. The testing showed arsenic in some private well water to be above safe levels. State and local health officials identified the Nonpareil and Hinkle Creek areas east of Sutherlin as having the highest levels of arsenic. The arsenic found in the wells is most likely coming from natural deposits in the bedrock and soil.

Some wells had levels of arsenic that greatly exceeded the recommended safe drinking water standard. State officials advise that people should not use their water for drinking or cooking if the level is above 10 part per billion (ppb).

Long-term residents living in the area may be drinking water with arsenic at levels that put their health in jeopardy. Residents with domestic wells are strongly urged to have their water tested for arsenic. Because arsenic testing is now required for real estate transactions, families purchasing and moving into homes won't unknowingly drink arsenic-contaminated water.

Map with high arsenic concentrations shown in shaded area.



How can arsenic affect my health?

People who drink water contaminated with arsenic over a long period of time have a greater risk for diabetes and various types of cancer, including lung, skin, bladder, kidney, nasal passages, liver and prostate cancers.

Some studies have shown that arsenic can also harm the reproductive, nervous and cardiovascular systems and cause darkening of the skin and the development of corns or warts. Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of arsenic because of their developing bodies and brains, and because they are not able to get rid of the arsenic from their bodies as easily as adults can.

What can I do?

The most important step is to test your well water for arsenic by contacting a certified lab in your area and carefully following its testing instructions. Certified labs go through an intense accreditation process, which makes their results the most reliable of any testing procedure. Names of certified labs are available at www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/orelap/docs/acclab.pdf, or by calling 503-693-4122. The closest certified lab to Sutherlin is the Umpqua Research Company, located in Myrtle Creek.

If I can't drink my water or cook with it, is it safe for other uses?

There is no harm in using your well water — even at levels as high as 500 ppb — for washing dishes, bathing, swimming or general cleaning purposes. Keep in mind that small children will need supervision in order to avoid swallowing water when bathing and brushing teeth.

What about my pets?

Animals should not drink water that has arsenic levels above 10 ppb.

Are there ways to remove arsenic from my water?

Yes. The most common filtration system used to remove arsenic from drinking water is called reverse osmosis. However, when arsenic levels are very high, even filtration systems may not remove enough to make the water safe to drink; in these cases, residents should consider other water sources for their drinking and cooking purposes. Also, filtration systems such as reverse osmosis require careful and proper maintenance in order to work.

If you are using a filtration system, make sure it is certified by a recognized third-party testing organization that meets strict testing standards established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and NSF International.

Can I boil my water to get rid of arsenic?

No. Boiling does not remove arsenic and can concentrate it.

For more information:

- Call Sujata Joshi, Oregon Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP), 971-673-1213, or Jerry Meyer, Douglas County Health Department, 541-440-3578;
- Visit www.healthoregon.org/ehap.

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