

Name: _____ Date: _____

How Safe is My Drinking Water? **(Part 1: Using the Safe Drinking Water** **Information System [SDWIS])**

Developed By: Melanie Sarino & Stefani Hines at the University of Arizona Southwest Environmental Health Sciences Center. <http://swehsc.pharmacy.arizona.edu/coep>



(Photographs from DrinkingH2O.com)

This exercise is designed to help familiarize you with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Safe Drinking Water Information System (SDWIS) and Query Form. The SDWIS database contains information that the states must report to the EPA under the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. **States must report water quality violations of three types to the EPA:**

- (1) **violations of maximum contaminant levels (MCL)** (i.e., if the maximum permissible level of a specific contaminant in the drinking water has been exceeded)
- (2) **violations of water treatment techniques** (i.e., if facilities did not use specific required methods to remove certain contaminants from drinking water), and
- (3) **violations of monitoring and reporting requirements of utilities** (i.e., if a utility did not follow required schedules to report water quality testing results.)

The SDWIS Query Form will enable you to find information on the safety of your own drinking water. Specifically, you will be able to locate your own local water systems and view their violations and enforcement histories since 1993. You will also have access to information on the contaminants found in your drinking water, their health effects, and EPA drinking water safety standards for these contaminants' levels.

**How Safe is My Drinking Water? (Part 1 continued:
Using the Safe Drinking Water Information System [SDWIS]**



DIRECTIONS:

1. **Log on** to the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Query Form at http://www.epa.gov/enviro/html/sdwis/sdwis_query.html
2. In the map on the bottom of the screen, **click on your home state.**
3. **Perform a "County Search"** by clicking on the pull-down menu next to "County Name" and select your home county. (NOTE: in the "Population Search" option just below this, keep "All Population Ranges" as the default selection.)
4. **Click the "Search" button** on the bottom of the page.
5. You will see the SDWIS Query Results, with a "List of Water Systems in SDWIS." **Click on the "Water System ID" of any water system you are interested in.**

6. You will see the “Safe Drinking Water Violation Report” for the water system you chose. **At this point, please answer the following questions:**

POINTS TO PONDER:

What is the name of the water system? Address?

What is its Primary Water Source Type?

What is the size of the population served?

When were the data for your results extracted? (Date?)

7. The first violations listed in the Safe Drinking Water Report are Health Based Violations, in which the amount of a contaminant exceeded the enforceable EPA standard (MCL) or the water was not treated properly. **Please answer the following questions on the MOST RECENT Health Based Violation:**

POINTS TO PONDER:

What was the contaminant?

What type of violation occurred? (Report what is recorded in the “Type of Violation” column, then click on the information in that column for a more detailed definition of the violation. Write down the more detailed definition for the “Type of Violation.”)

What was the time period of the violation? (Report beginning and ending dates.)

If available, report Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for this particular contaminant.

What was the contaminant level actually found in the violation?

8. **Click on the contaminant** in the “Contaminant” column (still in the MOST RECENT Health Based Violation). **Answer the following questions:**

POINTS TO PONDER:

What type of contaminant is this? (Microbiological, Radioactive, Inorganic, Synthetic Organic Contaminant (Including Pesticides and Herbicides), or Volatile Organic Contaminant)

What is/are the source(s) of this contaminant?

What the contaminant’s potential health effects at levels above the MCL?

9. If available, **click on the fact sheet for the contaminant and answer the following questions:**

POINTS TO PONDER:

List other names for the contaminant.

Discuss whether there is a difference between short-term and long-term effects of the contaminant.

In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. What does this law require the EPA to do?

What does “MCLG” stand for? Is it enforceable?

What is an “MCL”? Is it enforceable?

How is the contaminant produced and released to the environment? List major industries that produce the contaminant.

How is the contaminant detected and removed from your drinking water?

If the contaminant is found in your drinking water, what is the water system required to do?

What are the Drinking Water Standards for the contaminant?