



Community Environmental Resource Program

Serving the St. Louis and East St. Louis Communities

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Arsenic in our Water and on our Playgrounds. A Cause for Concern?

There's been mention in the news lately about levels of arsenic in the environment. We would like to spend some time discussing levels of arsenic in our drinking water and in wood. Arsenic is a chemical that is an important ingredient in pesticides, insecticides, and metal adhesives. Exposure to large doses of arsenic has been linked to leukemia and lung, skin and bladder cancer.

Arsenic in our drinking water?

Much talk about drinking water quality in the U.S. has centered around the health threat posed by arsenic. In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Water Drinking Act which set limits on contaminants allowed in drinking water. Action taken by the Clinton Administration to limit the amount of arsenic in drinking water from the current 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 parts per billion effective on March 23, 2001 has been put on hold by the new Bush Administration.

Christine Todd Whitman, the new administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, has requested a study by the National Academy of Sciences to determine what the limit should be. The EPA believes a standard will be set somewhere between 3 to 20ppb and will be in place by Feb. 22, 2002.

Should St. Louisans be worried? According to the 1999 Water Quality Reports by the St. Louis City Water Division and the Illinois American Water Company which supplies East St. Louis we should not be concerned. No arsenic level above one



part per billion (ppb) has been found in St. Louis City water samples in the past two years. The level of arsenic in the East St. Louis water supply is almost as low, with detectable levels not exceeding 2 ppb in 1999. At these extremely low amounts both water systems would be below even the most stringent requirements now being considered.

Fortunately, we have abundant surface water sources (water from rivers and streams) in the metro area and don't need to be too concerned about arsenic. Arsenic seems to be a

big problem with systems that use ground water but only a minor irritation for surface water systems.

Arsenic in our playgrounds?

Another area of concern lately has come from reports that pressure treated lumber sometimes referred to as "CCA treated lumber" used to build decks, playgrounds, and picnic tables may be laced with dangerous levels of arsenic. Arsenic is sometimes used to protect wood from erosion. Unfortunately, sometimes the arsenic seeps out. Recently, the state of Missouri issued recommendations regarding the use of this kind of CCA treated lumber:

- Kids should wash their hands before they eat, especially if they have been playing outside
- You shouldn't burn CCA treated lumber in you fireplace or wood stove.
- You shouldn't cut large amounts of CCA treated lumber in an unventilated area
- If used for picnic tables or play equipment, CCA treated lumber should be covered with a polyurethane sealer.
- You shouldn't use CCA treated lumber for constructing small, raised vegetable gardens.

How Good is the Water that We Drink?

Where Does our Drinking Water Come From?

As mentioned in the article on page 1, we don't have a problem with arsenic in our drinking water. But what about the overall quality of our drinking water? For years, the water systems on both sides of the river have met or exceeded all state and federal water quality standards. Before being allowed to enter your home, water is tested and treated for over 200 possible contaminants. Water is monitored at every stage - from raw water supplies from the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers - through the treatment pro-

cess - and finally through the many miles of pipeline which brings water to your homes and businesses.

In the City of St. Louis, the Water Division operates two water treatment plants that supply an average of 150 million gallons per day (the Howard Bend plant in Chesterfield and the Chain of Rocks plant in north St. Louis). The East St. Louis treatment plant is located at 800 N. Front Street and is operated by the Illinois-American Water Company.

Both of these water systems belong to the "Partnership for Safe Water" a national organization which is devoted to improving water quality throughout the United States and includes the EPA and the American Water Works Association.

Though our water departments test for more than 200 possible contaminants in finished drinking water, recent tests found traces of just 13 contaminants - all of which were well within state and federal safety levels.

Did You Know....

Water coming into the treatment plant may contain viruses, salts and metals, pesticides, solvents, gasoline, and even radioactive material.



Are There Any Health Risks in Drinking Tap Water?

Despite rigorous testing and treatment of our drinking water, some people may still be sensitive to the trace amounts of contaminants that exist. People with immune problems such as those with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, those who have undergone organ transplants, and those with HIV/AIDS should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers.

Great Web Site!

For more specific information about water quality across the nation and in your community check out the following website from the EPA:

www.epa.gov/ow

Did You Know....

The sources of drinking water in the U.S. are roughly split equally between surface sources (rivers, lakes, reservoirs) and ground water sources. But all the drinking water in St. Louis and East St. Louis comes from surface water sources (the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers). All drinking water (even bottled water!) may reasonably be expected to contain at least small amounts of contaminants.



Don't Get Burned By The Sun!

Those sunny days of summer have returned with the usual heat and humidity for which St. Louis is known. With more sun comes more time to spend outside. But also returning with the sun are the health risks associated with overexposure. Even during the winter we're exposed to some ultraviolet (UV) radiation (sunlight that causes damage to our skin). But during the summer the danger of overexposure is much greater. Here are some interesting facts and helpful suggestions to keep you and your family safe this summer:

FACT: Overexposure to UV radiation can cause very serious health problems including skin cancer, eye damage, and immune system breakdowns. Each year over 1.3 million Americans get skin cancer.

FACT: The increase in skin cancer in the U.S. since 1930 is up an amazing 1800% ! At the same time there has been a decrease in the earth's protective ozone layer most likely caused by pollutants that rise up to the sky and destroy it.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Wear protective clothing and wide brimmed hats when out in the sun for any length of time.
- Apply sun screen to exposed skin with a sun-protection-factor (SPF) of **at least 15 for adults and 30 for kids**. Reapply sun screen every couple of hours.
- Protect your eyes with sunglasses with **polarized** lenses (avoid really cheap sunglasses - they may not provide your eyes with the protection that you'll need).
- Be aware of the UV index for your area so that you can take necessary action when going outside. This is a scale from 1 to 10 that is reported on television weather-casts and in the newspaper. The higher the number for that day, the more sun protection you will need.



Did You Know....

People of color need to protect themselves from the sun despite the natural melanin (skin color) with which they are born.



Newsletter Update!

As reported in an earlier newsletter, the St. Louis region is facing pressure by the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce its ozone levels (harmful levels of air pollution). This past month, the EPA granted the region an extension to comply with federal ozone standards.

St. Louis now has until November 2004 to meet these standards. If the stricter standards are not met, the region will be bumped from "moderate non-attainment status" to "serious non-attainment status."

The "serious" rating would mean that the community has to work even harder to clean up its air. The Missouri and Illinois Legislatures likely would have to submit tougher clean-air plans to the EPA – or lose federal funds, including badly needed highway money.

Who Are We? How Can You Contribute?

The Community Environmental Resource Program (CERP) was launched this past September to provide needed environmental information to the people of St. Louis and East St. Louis. CERP is funded through the Environmental Protection Agency's EMPACT program - a national initiative aimed at providing communities across America with better access to information about the environment.

The program's goal is to empower citizens with information about potential environmental hazards. We want to become the community's leading source for environmental information!

CERP cannot do this without the help of the community. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact us. **Is there an area of concern that you would like us to address?? Just let us know!**

Where Can I Get More Information?

St. Louis

St. Louis Water Division	(314) 771-2255
Missouri Department of Health	(573) 751-6400
Missouri Department of Natural Resources	1-800-334-6946
St. Louis Health Division	(314) 658-1054

East St. Louis

Illinois-American Water Company	1-800-422-2782
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency	(217) 524-1321
Illinois Department of Public Health	(217) 782-4977
St. Clair County Health Dept.	(618) 233-7769

EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline	1-800-426-4791
EPA's Environmental Action Line	1-800-223-0425

Phone: (314) 421-4220 ext. 236 / (618) 274-2750 ext. 236 Fax: (314) 231-6120 Email: cerp@ewgateway.org
Website: <http://stlouis.missouri.org/cerp/>

Serving the St. Louis and East St. Louis Communities



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