

How safe is your drinking water?

What does 'Safe' mean?

In the past I have preached the benefits of hydration, the regular consumption of clean fresh water to prevent fatigue, lethargy, false appetite, bowel accumulation and kidney stress. I have also advised the use of water filters. "If you don't use one, you are one!" being a favorite line.

But how important is it to filter your water? Are we not protected by government guidelines, dictating to water companies a set of safety standards that will protect your short and long-term health. Perhaps not! In fact, we do not have an Act of Parliament here in Australia to protect us against water contamination. Water companies are guided, not regulated, by the National Health and Medical Research Council's Strict guidelines or which there are three sets, 1980, 1987 and 1996.

This makes things really difficult for water companies. Imagine if there were no speed limits, and everyone drove at a speed consistent with the pressures they faced at any given moment. We would have chaos on the roads.

Water companies have to work within the guidelines they are set. Stringent guidelines, legislated guidelines, make it much easier for these companies to operate.

There are no penalties for non-compliance. There is no compulsion to inform the public of a potential health risk. John Archer, in his book 'Sydney on Tap' predicts that up to 75,000 illness days and 550 deaths per year can be attributed to water contamination.

Even the contaminated water in Sydney a few years ago met the health requirements of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

Conventional water treatment is inadequate against chlorine resistant organisms such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, viruses and a variety of other parasites. Approximately 1/3 of Australians suffer irritable bowel syndrome. The cause has not yet been established, but waterborne viruses and parasites are high on the list of suspects.

Joan Rose, an expert in waterborne parasites and a respected authority across the world. She is a Professor of Microbiology in the department of marine sciences at the University of South Florida. She believes that drinking Tap Water, especially in a large metropolis, is like playing Russian Roulette. You never know what has escaped through the "system" and into your glass.

In 1993, in Milwaukee, 400,000 people fell ill due to Cryptosporidium with 100 dying. Analysis of Cryptosporidium levels at that time found between 1 and 10 organisms per glass full. In the Sydney disaster of 1998, Cryptosporidium levels topped 15 organisms per glass full.

A 1993 study in Canada discovered that users of reverse osmosis water filters suffered 30% less gastrointestinal disorders for the year.

None of the chemicals added to tap water have ever been proven to be safe for human consumption. Following the Vietnam war, thousands of autopsies on young fit

soldiers reveal high levels of cholesterol in coronary arteries, the cause being linked to the high volumes of chlorine in the drinking water.

The use of fluoride has always been a topic for hot debate.

Fluoride first appeared as being "beneficial" to humans following the Manhattan Project in the USA. A large number of law suits from workers exposed to high levels of fluoride whilst manufacturing the "A" bomb forced government lawyers to go down an interesting defense track. They went into court with volumes of fabricated claims about how exposure to low levels of fluoride is actually "good" for people.

Then along comes the Aluminium industry, desperately seeking a way to get rid of huge volumes of fluoride (a toxic bi-product from the smelting process), seized upon some questionable studies, presented in these trials, relating fluoride to reduced tooth decay. Frantic lobbying ended up with huge volumes of fluoride being dumped into drinking water. A novel way to dump toxic waste.

Many of the original supporters of this scheme have now become vehement opponents. There is some fascinating information about fluoride on the internet. An article by one of the most vocal researchers in the USA can be viewed at <http://www.inter-view.net/~sherrell/near.htm>.

Winston Churchill once said, "Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened."

And Mark Twain once said, "Loyalty to a petrified opinion never once broke a chain or freed a human soul."

Too much is left to chance. Consider the following possible contaminants to drinking water: dead beasts in river catchment areas; synthetic fertilizer residues finding their way into river systems; both Treated and untreated sewerage dumped either directly or indirectly into rivers; chemicals from airborne pollution delivered into rivers and dams by rainfall; copper leaching from pipes; lead leaching from brass tap fittings, and; the chemicals actually added to the water as part of the treatment process. And I have not covered anywhere near all of the possibilities.

One cigarette cannot kill you. Surely a single McDonalds hamburger won't either. But you are not going to take up smoking based on the risk levels associated with a single cigarette. Nor are you going to choose a McDonalds hamburger as your daily meal choice.

When it comes to water, it is simply too difficult a task for water companies to guarantee absolute safety, short or long term. It is up to you to guarantee your own safety. To do this, you must invest in a good quality, water filtration device, and then manage it the same way you would manage any other device that requires regular servicing.

It is foolhardy to ignore the huge questions hanging over the safety of public drinking water. Don't wait for another 20 years for a few disasters and finally some legislation. Take your precautions now and filter your water.

Your good health is in your hands.

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