

What's in your water?

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If you drink Gillette's water and worry about contaminants newly identified by the EPA, there's good news.

The city routinely tests for two of the contaminants — tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene — and none has been found.

The other two — acrylamide and epichlorohydrin — haven't been tested because there has been no rule to do so, said Diane Monahan, Gillette's water manager.

But because the contaminants typically come from water treatment facilities themselves, and because Gillette's water doesn't need to be treated because it comes from deep aquifers, there's no reason to suspect that they're there.

The Environmental Protection Agency said Monday that it will tighten drinking water standards on those four contaminants because they can cause cancer. The agency is expected to issue new rules on the compounds within the next year.

The City of Gillette tests for hundreds of possible contaminants in our drinking water. It monitors its water 24/7 and constantly tests drinking water in all quadrants of the city. It conducts water sampling in-house and at EPA-certified labs.

In April, the city will provide its water quality report from 2009 in people's monthly water bills. If there are any contaminants in Gillette's drinking water, they will have to be listed on the one-page document.

Monahan calls it the annual report card. "We've always done well."

In other words, Gillette's drinking water is safe.

"It's very good. It's very, very good. It's hard water, which frustrates the public," Monahan said. "We meet all the requirements and have great water."

Monahan said that acrylamide and epichlorohydrin are found when water is treated, and Gillette doesn't treat its water. It only uses a chlorine gas to disinfect the water, she said.

"We disinfect our water. We add nothing to it," she said.

Fluoride isn't added to the drinking water since it's naturally occurring in it.

The contaminants that drinking water is susceptible to largely depends on the environment, the source water and the local industry, she said.

Much of the city's water comes from underground aquifers that are usually too deep to be affected by the chemicals, Monahan said. Tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene can seep into drinking water from contaminated groundwater. They normally come from industries like dry cleaning companies.

Once they are regulated, Monahan said the two chemicals will be added to the city's long list of contaminants it tests for. The new EPA policy would be a minimal change for the city.

During its testing, if the city finds a contaminant, it must confirm it and notify the EPA. From there, it would follow the regulated procedures.

"We are on reduced sampling for many requirements because we meet or are below EPA guidelines for

many regulated containments," she said.

Where does our water come from?

Gillette pumps its water from the Madison aquifer, which is located near Pine Haven, and the Fort Union aquifer from wells around town.

In summertime, about 80 percent of the city's water comes from the Madison and the remaining 20 percent comes from the Fort Union. In the winter, the city draws from both sources equally.

Now, the city is pumping about 1 million to 1.5 million gallons from the Fort Union and 2 million to 2.5 million gallons from the Madison formation, said Diane Monahan, Gillette's water manager.

The city is redrilling its last five wells around town. The wells pump water from the Fort Union aquifer.

Production in the aged wells fell over time, and the redrilling will skyrocket production rates by more than 100 percent.