

Water Myths and Realities

As most of you know working for Nebraska Rural Water Association requires extensive travel. Most of us don't get into the office very often. Normally, there is a mountain of the usual reading material that travels throughout the office stacked up in my tray. I usually read the interesting stuff then see how much I can stuff into Jim's tray (He just loves that.) Recently I came across some interesting myths to share with you.

Myth: We have less water today than we did 100 years ago.

Reality: There is the same amount of water on Earth today as there was when the Earth was formed three billion years ago. The difference is that today many more demands are placed on water. Because our demands continue to grow but our supplies don't, everyone should lend a hand to conserve, protect, and get involved with decisions that affect our water resources.

Myth: Once you use water, it's gone.

Reality: After water is used, it's recycled innumerable times. Some water is recycled for use within a week, other water may not be used again for years. Water is resilient and responds well to treatment. However, using water and abusing water by contaminating lakes, streams, and wells with toxic chemicals are two different things. To keep our drinking water safe, we need not only appropriate treatment, but also appropriate source protection.

Myth: There are more pollutants in drinking water today than there were 25 years ago.

Reality: Not necessarily. Twenty-five years ago, we did not have the technology to know what was in our drinking water. Today, we have sophisticated testing instruments that enable us to know more about our water than ever before. The drinking water community is continually improving treatment processes as it learns more each year.

Myth: Using home water treatment devices will make tap water safer or healthier to drink.

Reality: Some people use home water filters to improve the taste, smell, or appearance of their tap water, but it does not necessarily make the water safer or healthier to drink. Additionally, all home treatment devices require regular maintenance. If the maintenance is not performed properly, water quality problems may result.

Myth: Bottled water is safer than tap water.

Reality: Not necessarily. Unlike tap water, the quality of finished bottled water is not government-monitored. Studies have shown that microbes may grow in the bottles while on grocers' shelves. You don't need to buy bottled water for safety reasons if your tap water meets all federal and state drinking water standards. If you want water with a different taste, you can buy bottled water, but it cost up to 1,000 times more than tap water. Of course, in emergencies, bottled water can be a vital source of drinking water for people without water.

Myth: “New” water is better than treated water.

Reality: There is very little water on Earth that is new. Most of our water has been touched by some type of human or animal activity. Even in remote wilderness areas, studies have found bacteria contaminating water. Therefore, it’s always best to drink water that you know has been treated. Before drinking water from a stream, boil it for one minute at sea level or three minutes at higher elevations. This will completely kill all bacteria, viruses, and germs.

Well that’s enough myths for this addition, time to stuff Jim’s tray.