

News Release

For release: April 8, 2003

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DEQ Study Finds Some Pesticide Contamination In Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater

*Second year of sampling shows levels of pesticides in wells not a health risk now,
but presence of chemicals a concern for future in southern Willamette Valley*

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has determined that samples taken from almost one hundred wells in the southern Willamette Valley confirm the presence of pesticides in some of the groundwater wells. But the results found no unhealthful levels of pesticides.

There were pesticides at levels of less than one part per billion found in more than 60 wells. Concentrations of pesticides never exceeded one third of the federally established public drinking water standards. Thirty of the study wells had no measurable levels of pesticides.

The results come in the second year of a DEQ groundwater study of unincorporated areas in the Willamette Valley north of Eugene and south of Salem. The first year of the project, only nitrate levels were measured. While some nitrate can be naturally present, concentrations over three milligrams per liter indicate effects from land use. Several areas of high nitrate concentrations were found, indicating that those areas of groundwater can be susceptible to infiltration from land use at the surface. Since high nitrate levels can indicate places where other contaminants may infiltrate the groundwater, DEQ's second year study sampled for pesticides, metals and other contaminants in the wells that had previously had nitrate values greater than 7 milligrams per liter.

Pesticide levels found in household and public wells are well below the levels that the Environmental Protection Agency says would cause a health risk. But some of the pesticides found tend to persist in groundwater for years. Meanwhile, land use practices may result in further infiltration. Once the sources of contamination can be identified, community members can work together with state agencies to develop plans for practices that will reduce risk.

(More/over)



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For a large number of residents in the southern Willamette Valley, groundwater is the principal source of drinking water and irrigation water supply. Portions of this area are already densely populated, and more growth is expected. Demands for abundant, high quality groundwater will rise with the increase in populations.

Groundwater assessment and protection is a critical component of Oregon's overall water quality protection and management strategy. DEQ begins with identifying groundwater quality problems. When contamination is identified, groundwater management committees comprised of local stakeholders may be formed to develop groundwater management plans, in collaboration with state government agencies. Public education, research and demonstration projects are established to increase public awareness. The ultimate goal is groundwater protection for Oregonians.

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