



# Onondaga County Health Department

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## Recommendations for Individual Water Supplies on Surface Water Sources

The finding of harmful algal blooms and related toxins in the summer of 2017 clearly demonstrated the susceptibility of raw water contamination from surface supplies such as Skaneateles and Otisco Lakes. During September and October, there was overwhelming, and justified, concern from homeowners drawing water directly from Skaneateles Lake when the water was declared unfit for use. Even with individual filtration and disinfection systems in place, the Health Department advised against the use of these water supplies for bathing and consumption.

Based on extreme variability of surface water quality, both the New York State Department of Health and the Onondaga County Health Department advise against the use of surface water for potable purposes when an individual supply is required. Whenever possible, the preferred method for providing water to homes is through a properly drilled and protected well.

The Health Department recommends that any property owner that can locate a drilled well in full conformance with today's minimum separation standards do so. However, we also recognize the fact that many lakeside homes have individual sewage disposal systems or other restrictions that may not allow installation of a drilled well in conformance with these standards. Where this is the case, in most instances, it is likely that a properly constructed and protected drilled well would provide a better source of water than the surface source. It is advised to add disinfection for treatment of the water from those wells that cannot fully comply with separation distances. It is intended here that you maximize the distance between the well and the source of potential contamination. Of course, using bottled water from a known acceptable source for potable purposes such as cooking and drinking is an option in these instances.

Disinfection of the water can be provided by one of several methods. Chlorination is the system used by most public systems and can also be used on an individual household basis. It has the advantage that the amount of chlorine in the water can be tested to check on the operation of the system. Increasingly, ultraviolet light systems are being installed in household systems for disinfection. These systems can be effective treatment devices provided that the water passing through them is clear and the unit is checked regularly and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. This is critical due to the fact that unlike the chlorination system, there is no easy test that can be done to check on the system operation.

**\*\*Homeowners that must, or choose to, continue using surface water as their water source are strongly encouraged to use only bottled water for consumption and culinary purposes. Using a surface water source, whether treated or not, is solely AT YOUR OWN RISK.\*\***

In all cases, laboratory testing of the potable water supplied to homes from individual sources should be done on a regular basis. Following the steps as recommended herein increases the likelihood of a safe and sustainable water supply to your homes.

Please call the Division of Environmental Health at (315) 435-6600 with any questions regarding this notice.