



Transcript: Where Does Connecticut Water Come From?
Interview with Lori Mathieu, Section Chief, Drinking Water Section
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Narrator: You know when you turn on your faucet or shower head you get water, but do you know how it gets there? I'm here with Lori Mathieu, Section Chief for the Connecticut Department of Public Health's Drinking Water Section to talk about drinking water.

Hi Lori, maybe you can shed some light on this topic for us. Where does Connecticut's drinking water come from?

Lori: Connecticut's drinking water supplies are a variety of different sources of supply in a number of different systems across the entire state. Most of the sources of supply come from your high quality sources that are well-protected and are pristine sources, and therefore, the need for treatment is reduced, and it also helps protect public health.

Narrator: So does it come from reservoirs? Does it come from the ground? Where does it come from?

Lori: Connecticut's sources are a variety of sources. We have a hundred and fifty large reservoir systems in the state which serve the majority of people that consume and have public drinking water to their houses. There also are systems that have groundwater supplies. Some groundwater supplies have a higher capacity than others. Some come from what we call "sand and gravel aquifers." Some come from bedrock supplies in the ground.

There are four very large systems in the state of Connecticut that, combined, serve about two million people. And then, in some cases across the state, there are some towns that have a small system that might serve just over a thousand people or five thousand people. As a small state, we have a very large number of public water systems. There's over twenty-five hundred public water systems that have a variety of sources and there actually are over four thousand public water supply sources across the state. Of the twenty-five hundred public water systems, two thousand of those are what we call "non-community systems." An example of a non-community system is, there's actually two different types, there's a school with a few wells that serve just the school, that's a non-community system, that what we call a "non-transient system." And then, the other type of non-community system is a "transient system" which is your, maybe it's a Dunkin Donuts or a 7-11 that has a well that serves just that business, and that's a transient non-community system. And again, there's two thousand of those types in Connecticut.

So there's about, also, a little bit over five hundred community systems, or what we would think of as residential systems. Community systems in Connecticut serve about two point nine million people in the state. Of the five hundred systems, approximately ninety-six or so serve a population of a thousand or more people and the ninety-six systems in the state of Connecticut serve the majority of the people

that are served by public water and they serve approximately two point seven million people of the entire two point nine [million] that are served by public water statewide. Those ninety-six systems operate the larger sources of supply in the state of Connecticut. They have the reservoirs, they have the surface water treatment plants that they operate. They also have the higher capacity drinking water supply wells that are sand and gravel supplies.

Narrator: So what is the Drinking Water Section's role? I mean, there's a lot of systems, there's about twenty-five hundred public water systems you said, so what is your role as far as making sure Connecticut's water is safe?

Lori: The role of my section, the Drinking Water Section within the state Department of Public Health, is to enact primacy and we have the responsibility of primacy. Primacy is provided to us by the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, through their regional office in Boston. Primacy essentially is that the state of Connecticut, through my section and the Department of Public Health, has to enact the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Safe Drinking Water Act, which was initiated in nineteen-seventy-four and has been updated over the decades since that time, is a set of requirements and rules on testing for water quality. For all of the various, again, twenty-five hundred public water systems, there's a variety of different requirements on water quality testing. As well as, another part of what my section does and is responsible for through primacy, is to assure that the water systems that are out there are inspected on a periodic basis.

So we have, in my section, a very large contingent of engineers, that are sanitary engineers, that actually oversee the systems. They conduct sanitary surveys of the large systems, large community systems, we are out there every three years and conduct a detailed sanitary review of that system. We look for Public Health Code violations, and we look to get those violations fixed as quickly as possible. For the smaller non-community systems, we are out there on an every five-year basis and, again, we're conducting a survey, reviewing that system and issuing reports.

Also, another large portion of our job is to oversee the drinking water quality testing that is a requirement under primacy and the Safe Drinking Water Act. We oversee about, and process, over half a million water quality sample results every single year. And that review of water quality results assures that the water systems are doing the requirements under the Safe Drinking Water Act. And if there are any violations, any contaminant level violations, we have to work with the water system to address those violations.

Narrator: Now the EPA has regulations and standards for our drinking water, is there anything that separates Connecticut from other states to make our drinking water a little bit safer?

Lori: Before nineteen-seventy-four, the state of Connecticut had rules and laws in place as far back as the early nineteen hundreds that protected sources of public drinking water. There's a variety of state statutes that have existed since the early nineteen hundreds. A few in particular protect the drinking

water supplies by assuring that the sources are not polluted by a variety of different measures and a variety of different unique laws from the early nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. As time went on, treatment plants were built in the nineteen-twenties and –thirties and along came the need to protect the land, as well, around the reservoirs. And in the seventies laws were passed, and in the nineteen-eighties they were enhanced, that dealt with the protection of the lands that surround the sources of supply, and this is what we call “water company-owned land laws,” and that’s unique in the state of Connecticut. As well as a law, a very unique law across the country, that does not allow sewage treatment plants to be located in areas that could potentially harm a surface water supply if that sewage treatment plant was to fail or overflow. So that’s a very unique law and protects our drinking water supplies very well and has done a very good job at assuring drinking water quality statewide. So, a combination of state law and federal law in Connecticut makes for unique protections of our drinking water.

Narrator: Now most of us are customers of public water systems. Is there a way to find out how our water system’s doing, maybe a report that comes out to make sure that they’re doing a good job?

Lori: Yes, as a matter of fact, there is a requirement under the Safe Drinking Water Act through EPA, which my program administers oversight of, it’s a report called the Consumer Confidence Report. We refer to that report as the CCR. That report is an annual report, produced by the water system, and made available by the water system to their consumers. And, again, it’s produced annually, every July. These reports are available to the customer. Which are, they’re brief reports, they break out the water quality, if there’s any water quality issues, if there’s any other concerns, if there’s any, you know, what the water system is doing to protect the drinking water supply. In that report, there’s a lot of information that consumers can get on their water system and, again, the water system makes those reports available and you, as a consumer, have a right to see that report. Some reports, and there’s a variety of ways the water systems provide that information, and in your periodic bills you might actually get a copy of the report on an annual basis. Some, the bigger systems in Connecticut, have websites where they post their CCRs, or Consumer Confidence Reports. And some, don’t make it directly available through mailings, but they have to make it available upon request. So, if anyone is interested in receiving a copy of their CCR for their water system they should definitely contact their public water system directly.

Narrator: Well, thanks, Lori. I feel a lot better knowing that you and your section are here to help protect our water. For more information about drinking water systems, visit our website at www.ct.gov/dph/drinkingwaterweek or call (860) 509-7333.