

BIG SKY WATER & SEWER DISTRICT NO. 363  
PO BOX 160670 - BIG SKY, MT 59716

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DRINKING WATER**

**Recent Test Samples Show Coliform Bacteria in BIG SKY COUNTY WATER AND SEWER DIST 363 Water**

Our water system recently exceeded a drinking water standard. Although this is not an emergency, as our customers, you have a right to know what happened, what you should do, and what we are doing to correct this situation. All public water systems in Montana must be tested for coliform bacteria on a regular basis. On January 17, 2012, the District took 5 routine monthly samples to test for the presence of coliform bacteria throughout the Mountain and Meadow Villages. One of the five samples showed the presence of total coliform bacteria, (**not fecal coliform or E. coli**). As required after a positive sample, repeat samples were taken. Two repeat samples were taken from the source well and were negative for all coliform. One sample was taken from a service upstream of the faucet that produced the total coliform positive sample and the results were also negative. Two additional samples were taken from the same faucet that produced the positive total sample and also one sample from the first service downstream and these 3 samples were positive for total coliform. The EPA standard is that no more than 1 sample per month may contain total coliform. Please note that all of these 11 samples taken in January tested **NEGATIVE FOR FECAL & E. COLI COLIFORM**

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

This is not an emergency. If it had been, you would have been notified immediately. Total coliform bacteria are generally not harmful themselves. Coliforms are bacteria which are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other; potentially-harmful, bacteria may be present. Coliforms were found in more samples than allowed and this was a warning of potential problems. Usually, coliforms are a sign that there could be a problem with the treatment or distribution system (pipes) or the sample point (faucet). Whenever coliform bacteria is detected in any sample, follow-up testing is done to see if other bacteria of greater concern, such as fecal coliform or E. coli, are present. We did not find any of these bacteria in our follow-up testing.

**WHAT IS BEING DONE?**

The Big Sky public water system does not normally add chlorine to disinfect the water. However, as a precaution due to these positive total coliform samples in January, the District temporarily added chlorine (<1 parts/million) to the water to insure complete disinfection of the water mains and service lines. As a result, you may have noticed a slight chlorine taste in the water lately. Since treatment the last round of water samples taken February 6, have come back negative for all bacteria including total coliform bacteria. As always, the District will continue to monitor the water on a regular basis to assure we have safe drinking water.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

You do not need to boil your water, or take any other corrective actions. However, if you have specific health concerns, consult your doctor. People with severely compromised immune systems, infants, and some elderly may be at increased risk. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their

health care providers. General guidelines on ways to lessen the risk of infection by microbes are available from EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

**Understanding Total coliform, fecal coliform, and E. coli**

Total coliform, fecal coliform, and E. coli are all indicators of drinking water quality. The total coliform group is a large collection of different kinds of bacteria. Fecal coliforms are types of total coliform that mostly exist in feces. E. coli is a sub-group of fecal coliform. When a water sample is sent to a lab, it is tested for total coliform. If total coliform is present, the sample will also be tested for either fecal coliform or E. coli, depending on the lab testing method. Total coliform bacteria are commonly found in the environment (e.g., soil or vegetation) and are generally harmless. If only total coliform bacteria are detected in drinking water, the source is probably environmental. Fecal contamination is not likely. However, if environmental contamination can enter the system, there may also be a way for pathogens to enter the system. Therefore, it is important to find the source and resolve the problem. Fecal are a sub-group of total coliform bacteria. They appear in great quantities in the intestines and feces of people and animals. The presence of fecal coliform in a drinking water sample often indicates recent fecal contamination. This would mean that there is a greater risk that pathogens are present than if only total coliform bacteria is detected.

E. coli is a sub-group of the fecal coliform group. Most E. coli bacteria are harmless and are found in great quantities in the intestines of people and warm-blooded animals. Some strains, however, can cause illness. The presence of E. coli in a drinking water sample almost always indicates recent fecal contamination meaning there is a greater risk that pathogens are present.

**A note about E. coli:** E. coli outbreaks receive much media coverage. Most outbreaks have been caused by a specific strain of E. coli bacteria known as E. coli O157:H7. When a drinking water sample is reported as "E. coli present", it does not mean this dangerous strain is present, in fact, it is probably not present. However, it does indicate recent fecal contamination. Boiling or treating contaminated drinking water with a disinfectant destroys all forms of E. coli, including O157:H7.

For more information, please contact the District Operator, Jim Muscat, at the Big Sky Water & Sewer office at 406-995-2660 or 406-580-6138 or PO Box 160670, Big Sky, MT 59716

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Subscribed and sworn to before me this

23rd day of February 2012

Glennnda Burton

Notary Public for the State of Montana,  
residing at Bozeman, Montana.



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