

Laguna Madre Water District Water Quality

The City of South Padre Island met recently with representatives of the Laguna Madre Water District to discuss water quality issues due to the Violation Notices that have been sent to customers. Because the Water District has very strict guidelines to follow when sending notices, the City of South Padre Island is attempting to put their mandatory language in terms easier to understand.

Lead and Copper

Due to the Flint, Michigan lead crisis, many people are concerned that we may also have lead in our water. Lead occurs in water from lead soldering on copper pipes used in older homes. Public water systems are required to test for lead in the water every three years. The results from their lead testing indicate VERY low levels of lead, less than .001 milligrams per liter (mg/l) and low levels of copper, less than .067 mg/l, well below the maximum levels allowed by the EPA (.015 mg/l for lead and 1.3 mg/l for copper). Samples are obtained from homes built in the 1980's when lead soldering was used to connect copper pipes together. In addition to the existing homes tested, the Laguna Madre Water District is going to begin voluntarily testing an additional five homes on South Padre Island to ensure a continuous safe water supply for our residents.

Trihalomethanes

Trihalomethanes occur in water when chlorine reacts with naturally occurring organic material found in water. The Laguna Madre District has two water plants, one in Laguna Vista and one in Port Isabel. The majority of the water we use every day comes from the Laguna Vista plant because it is newer and uses "micro-filtration" to remove contaminants from the water and improve taste. The Port Isabel water plant is an older plant that includes a conventional form of filtration using carbon and sand filters. This plant is used only during peak times when water demand is higher. The Laguna Madre Water District switched from using free chlorine to a disinfectant called Chloramines. This reduces the potential of having trihalomethanes in our water.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality heavily regulate Public Water Systems including testing, treatment types, notices, construction, licensing, etc... One requirement they have put in place is that the trihalomethane testing and reporting is done on an annual average basis. So, if one month the numbers are high, it affects the average for an entire year. This is what happened with the Laguna Madre Water District's test reports requiring subsequent notices that went out to customers. Because the switch was made and free chlorine is no longer used as a disinfectant, the trihalomethane potential has been greatly reduced and should no longer be a problem.

It is important to note that chlorine is still used as a disinfectant and all public water systems use chlorine in some form. If you buy bottled water, keep in mind that it has an expiration date because these companies remove the chlorine.