



Media Release

Contamination Found in Streams Following Camp Fire

Public Warned to Avoid Untreated Surface Waters for Drinking, Cooking

For Immediate Release:

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REDDING – State water quality officials cautioned the public not to drink or cook with untreated surface water from streams throughout the Camp Fire burn area after bacteria and other contaminants were detected in water samples.

Laboratory analyses of surface water samples found concentrations of bacteria (E.Coli), aluminum, antimony and some polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) that exceeded water quality standards for drinking water.

“Given the fire’s devastating impacts, the results aren’t surprising, and in fact are lower than expected,” said Clint Snyder, Central Valley Water Board Assistant Executive Officer. “People in this region should not drink or use these untreated surface waters for any cooking.”

These surface waters are not a source of drinking water for homes, with the exception of some shallow wells along Butte Creek where creek water may seep into the wells. Home owners with shallow wells along Butte Creek should review their well construction details and consider testing their well water.

Last week, the [Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board](#) conducted targeted sampling of surface waters at various locations throughout the Camp Fire burn area and downstream of the burn area, in coordination with Butte County, California Department of Water Resources, and the California Department of Transportation.

Although testing found elevated levels of aluminum, antimony and iron, these metals are also naturally occurring, explained Snyder. Further study will be required to determine what percentages are naturally occurring and what percentages are attributable to runoff from the burn area.

Aluminum and antimony were detected above the primary maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) for those metals at several sampling locations. Primary MCLs are drinking water standards adopted as regulations to protect public health.

Concentrations of iron exceeding secondary maximum contaminant levels were also detected in some samples. Secondary MCLs are aesthetic standards, meaning the public might notice changes in the taste, odor, or color of the water.

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are a class of chemicals that occur naturally in carbon containing substances such as coal, crude oil, and gasoline. PAHs are also produced when wood, garbage and other carbon-based substances are burned. The State Water Board analyzed samples for 22 PAHs and of those, five were detected above applicable thresholds.

Additional data is required to determine if the concentrations detected during the January sampling are representative of post-fire surface water quality in the burn area. Our agencies will continue to monitor surface waters throughout the winter and spring and will provide updates to the public regarding these monitoring efforts as results become available.

Home owners with shallow wells along Butte Creek should review their well construction details and consider testing their well water. Visit www.ButteCountyRecovers.org to download the Private Well Safety and Testing guidance or call the Butte County Environmental Health Division at (530) 552-3880 for more information.

The public should direct any questions regarding the quality of their drinking water supplied by a public water system to their local water purveyor or the State Water Board's [Division of Drinking Water](#) at (530) 224-4800.