Protecting Our Drinking Water

The Situation

Increased growth and development in the Boise Valley has occurred during the past twenty years. Projected growth figures indicate that Ada County will grow from the 1990 U.S. Census figures of 206,000 to 333,000 by the year 2010.

Safe and adequate drinking water supplies will play a significant role in future growth and development of arid Southwest Idaho. Boise receives approximately 13 inches of precipitation per year, mostly in the form of snowfall and rain during the winter months. During the past 6 years, however, precipitation has been less than normal, producing a severe drought, and resulting in increased consumption pressure on available water resources.

The Boise area relies on ground water to provide more than 90% of its drinking water. Large public drinking water systems obtain water from wells with depths ranging from 500 to 900 feet, while smaller water purveyors tend to draw their drinking water from shallower depths of 40 to 100 feet. A recent Boise State University study found the polluted shallow aquifer and clean deep one are, in many areas, separated only by layers of gravel and sand. That means polluted water in the shallow aquifer could easily flow into the deeper one.

Currently, known or suspected ground water contamination has been identified in more than 70 Boise Valley sites. The majority of the sites are contaminated with petroleum products from above ground and underground storage tanks. Other types of contamination include solvents and nitrates. Tetrachloroethylene has been identified in some public and several private drinking water wells.

Ground water contamination is receiving much publicity in the area media. Participants in an Extension 1991 Town Hall meeting conducted in Boise identified water quality protection and water conservation as major priorities for Extension educational programming.

Our Response

The Ada County Extension Home Economist responded to the public’s desire for water quality protection information by working with senior water quality analysts at the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to become knowledgeable about water quality issues, and to develop a public education program. In the Spring of 1992, a one-session class entitled “Protecting Our Drinking Water” was developed and presented to approximately 150 county residents through a series of Leader Training meetings and a presentation to a Boise service club. The lesson includes pre- and post-tests, a comprehensive Leader’s Guide, slides and script, handouts for participants, and background information for lesson leaders. Publicity about the county’s Hazardous Waste Disposal Day was presented to 850 county residents via the May issue of the Home Economics Newsletter and flyers distributed to service clubs and at the Extension Office.

A one page article about household water conservation was included in the July/August Home Economics Newsletter sent to over 5,200 Southwest Idaho residences.

The Results

Participants rated the class informative and helpful. Pre- and post-tests completed by 98 participants showed a 2.44 point knowledge gain (Pre-test mean=5.0, Post-test mean=7.44 out of a possible 10 points).

As a direct result of Cooperative Extension’s involvement, linkages with other agencies have been created and maintained. Presentations to community...
service clubs are planned for 1993/94. The public is receiving education contributing to a greater understanding of water quality issues, and learning about individual efforts that will protect our drinking water supplies.

For More Information
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