

How Do I Find Groundwater Quality Information in California?

John Borkovich, GAMA Program Manager

The distinction between data and information needs to be made with respect to monitoring groundwater quality. “Basic needs” questions like: “Is my well water safe to drink and what is the quality of my well water?” are routinely asked by members of the public to government officials whose responsibility is to collect groundwater quality data.

The challenge facing groundwater quality monitoring programs is to communicate the data results in a format that can be not only understood but also used by the public. AB 599, the Groundwater Quality Monitoring Act of 2001, had two major goals: to comprehensively monitor groundwater quality in the state and to make groundwater quality information more readily available to the public.

The State Water Board is addressing comprehensive groundwater quality monitoring in collaboration with the LLNL and USGS. Dozens of groundwater basins in the state have been sampled by the USGS for the State Water Board’s Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) Priority Basin Project. These data and the enormous dataset from the CDPH for public water systems as well as other groundwater quality monitoring data sources are being used to create an internet-accessible database that can be used by the public to share groundwater quality information – GeoTracker GAMA.

Evaluating current and future trends in groundwater quality and employing new analytical innovations are necessary and vital steps in better understanding the condition of California’s groundwater quality data.

Working with the public on making groundwater quality data and information understandable is a critical goal of the GAMA program to help prevent future degradation of our water resources. To help achieve our goals, GAMA is working toward releasing - very soon - a revamped public-released website that will be based upon the “theme-based” workgroup vision of the Water Quality Monitoring Council.