



City of Phoenix

WATER SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Quality Reliability Value

Seasonal Taste and Odor in Drinking Water

Frequently Asked Questions

Background: Taste or odor variations are often seasonal (stronger near fall months) due to increased algae in the canals that transport surface water to Phoenix's treatment plants. About 98% of Phoenix's water supply is surface water; primarily snow melt that travels down the Salt, Verde and Colorado Rivers, then to canals that lead to Phoenix's water treatment plants.

1. Why does my tap water have an unusual taste or odor?

This is the result of a byproduct of seasonal algae in surface water called Geosmin and Methylisoborneol (MIB), which are non-harmful, naturally-occurring compounds associated with algae growth in lakes and canals. These are harmless, aesthetic aspects that some residents may notice. Taste, odor and hardness are not regulated under drinking water and health standards. The canal algae are removed during the treatment process, although the scent may remain. The chlorine used in our treatment process to disinfect your water also can affect the taste and odor.

2. Does the taste or odor mean my water is unsafe?

Phoenix tap water meets or surpasses all regulatory requirements for health and safety. Over five million tests and measurements are performed each year throughout the treatment and distribution systems and analyzed using state of the art equipment and laboratories. Phoenix also submits hundreds of reports each year to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department. Be assured that if water quality is ever an issue in Phoenix, customers will be notified.

3. What is Phoenix doing to help improve the taste of our water?

The city continues to enhance the aesthetics of our tap water, even though the quality is extremely high, by using carbon during treatment (much like that in a refrigerator filter). The Salt River Project (SRP) also brushes its canals to help diminish taste and odor causing algae.

4. Do I need to use water filters at home?

Since Phoenix water meets or surpasses standards, water filters are typically not necessary unless advised by your physician or as desired for aesthetic reasons. If you choose to use filters on your tap, refrigerator, etc., be sure to change filters according to manufacturer's instructions. More information about home treatment systems is available from the Water Quality Association. They can be reached at wqa.org; or at WQA@wqa.org.

5. Where can I get more information about water?

Detailed information about the quality of Phoenix's water is available online at phoenix.gov/water, where you'll find a copy of our annual Water Quality Report. You also may call the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline for information about the Safe Drinking Water Act or EPA's other drinking water programs at 800-426-4791.

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