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Our waterQuality Purification of harvested rainwater

I recently attended the national conference of the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association, held in Santa Monica, Calif. It was well-attended by professionals ranging from system designers and installers to people researching the health risks of catchment water. Exhibitors demonstrated the latest technological advances in rainwater-catchment equipment. Australia and New Zealand, where 17 percent and 10 percent of households, respectively, practice rainwater harvesting, were well represented. Both nations' governments encourage rainwater harvesting by offering rebates and financial incentives.

It was abundantly clear at the conference that, at least with the audience, catchment water is perceived as a resource to mitigate against the consequences of drought, growth, and decreasing water supplies. In New Mexico, some homeowners turn to rainwater harvesting because of declining well water quality and/or supply. Awareness of the value of rainwater catchment is in transition from meeting individual household needs and living "off the grid" to a more community-based consciousness of sustainability. Developers are integrating rainwater harvesting, both active and passive, in community development. Another focus of the conference was the diversion, capture and slowing down of stormwater runoff, which is a common



STEPHEN WIMAN

missed opportunity in water conservation.

In whole-house, domestic-water catchment systems, rooftop rainwater is directed to collection devices by downspouts, conveyed by a collection network and stored in cisterns (tanks) ranging in complexity from rain barrels to surface and subsurface cisterns. The chemical makeup of catchment water is dictated by geographic location, the composition of the rainwater, the roofing material and organic substances (like bird droppings and insects) on the roof, and other factors. The health risks of harvested water can be minimized by proper maintenance, especially by regular cleaning of gutters.

The required quality of water depends on the intended usage of the water, whether irrigation (most common in our area) or drinking water. The greatest concern is of course with bacteria. In general, catchment water is of very high quality. In a recent comparison of laboratory test results (contributed by Doug Pushard of HarvestH2O) from well water and harvested cistern water at a residence near Lamy, the cistern water contained lower levels of contamination except for iron and zinc (attributable to tank composition) and coliform bacteria.

Bacterial contamination is also common in well-water cisterns and is easily handled through the proper combination of pre-treatment and ultraviolet radiation. (More about UV in a future column.)

Stephen Wiman has a background in earth science (Ph.D. in geology) and is the owner of Good Water Company in Santa Fe. He may be reached at 505-471-9036 and skwiman@goodwatercompany.com.

Water chemistry, Lamy

Contaminant	MCL	Cistern	Well
Hardness	N/A	17	170
Alkalinity	N/A	ND	140
TDS	500(S)	ND	230
Coliform bact.	P/A	Present	None
Aluminum	0.05(S)	ND	ND
Calcium	N/A	5.5	53
Chloride	250(S)	ND	23
Copper	1(S)	0.006	0.064
Iron	0.3(S)	0.072	0.027
Lead	0.015	ND	0.007
Magnesium*	N/A	0.74	8.6
Manganese	0.05(S)	0.02	0
pH	6.5-8.5 (S)	6.9	7.2
Silver	0.1(S)	ND	0
Sulfate	250(S)	ND	40
Zinc	5	1.1	0.22

Levels (except coliform and pH) in milligrams/L (ppm)
MCL: EPA maximum contaminant level
N/A: no MCL exists, ND: not detected
(S): EPA secondary drinking water standard

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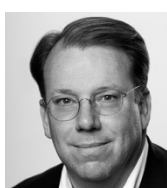
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