



Analysis & Recommendation

Surface Water Intakes – Public Water Systems - Animas River

Recommendation

In cooperation with federal and local agencies and since the August 5 Gold King mine spill, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has been monitoring water quality in the Animas River. Because water quality in the Animas has returned to background levels for regulated compounds, it is acceptable for water systems with direct intakes to utilize the Animas River - provided the water is fully treated for surface water standards. All new data will be analyzed and the results will be reported when available.

Rationale

All surface waters (rivers and lakes) in the state are assumed to be contaminated with pathogens due to normal stream runoff from animal feces and other contaminants. Thus, a strict, multi-barrier approach is outlined in the Colorado Primary Drinking Water Regulations¹ and the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Multiple barriers always include filtration and disinfection for surface waters.

From the location of the Gold King mine to the point at which the Animas River leaves the state, CDPHE only regulates two public water systems that operate intakes on the Animas River. CDPHE has been working closely with those two water systems: analyzing water quality, evaluating treatment capabilities and discussing water usage. The above conclusion about utilizing surface water intakes is partially based upon the results of 59 samples taken from the Animas River during the period of August 7 through August 18.

Since August 5, the CDPHE has also assisted public water systems that serve water from groundwater wells located near the Animas River. During the period of August 9 - August 17, the CDPHE has performed 34 sampling events at 12 public water systems that serve groundwater. Of all the validated samples, the CDPHE has not detected any contaminants above the regulated maximum contaminant levels (MCL). The CDPHE continues to finalize validation of all the data.

Update (12/01/15)

Since September, CDPHE has worked with the City of Durango and the Animas Water Company to collect water quality data for key parameters entering their drinking water distribution systems. Durango utilized water directly from the Animas River and the Animas Water Company operates a shallow well near the river. Based on water quality sampling, the Animas River spill did not significantly impact drinking water.

¹ Colorado Regulation 11.