

# Protecting the local water supply

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Chair of the OWASA Board of Directors

With the tragedy of contaminated water supply in West Virginia recently in the national news, I would like to offer information that I hope will be useful and reassure customers of the Orange Water and Sewer Authority, the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community's publicly-owned, non-profit water, wastewater and reclaimed water utility.

## Where does our drinking water come from?

OWASA has three local water supplies: Cane Creek Reservoir (our primary source), University Lake and the Quarry Reservoir west of Carrboro. The watersheds (areas from which water drains into the lakes) of our water supplies are primarily in Orange County and they are protected by local ordinances that limit development.

We also have an allocation of water from Jordan Lake which we could access if necessary during a severe drought or operational emergency.

## How is the water in OWASA's reservoirs protected?

Protecting water in our lakes is the first line of defense in ensuring a high-quality drinking water supply. It is much better to keep pollutants out of lakes than to remove them later.

Through cooperation of the Orange County, Carrboro and Chapel Hill governments, the density and impact of development in our Cane Creek Reservoir and University Lake watersheds are limited by some of the most progressive watershed zoning, streamside buffer requirements, and impervious surface limits in North Carolina.

Most new residential development is limited to one residence per five acres. Such strict development standards reduce the potential of spilled contaminants ever reaching our reservoirs. OWASA has acquired or holds conservation easements on more than 2,000 acres of land in the Cane Creek watershed.

Please call 911 immediately if you see activity that you believe may contaminate our water resources. If you are not sure whether to report something, please err on the side of caution. For concerns specific to OWASA (or if you are not sure), please call us at 919-968-4421 at any time of day.

## How is water treated and provided?

We filter and disinfect the water from our reservoirs to drinking water quality

at our Jones Ferry Road Water Treatment Plant in Carrboro. We monitor the quality of the drinking water leaving our plant around the clock to ensure it is safe. Our drinking water is provided to our customers through a network of about 400 miles of pipe which is also routinely monitored to ensure we maintain that high quality.

## After water is treated, how does OWASA protect its quality?

Our laboratory staff routinely tests water from the pipes and other facilities that make up our drinking water distribution system. Annually, we conduct more than 40,000 tests and publish a summary of the results at [www.owasa.org](http://www.owasa.org). OWASA will also test water from your tap for free upon request.

We require various institutions and businesses, and owners of swimming pools and irrigation systems, to maintain devices that prevent non-drinking water in their systems from flowing back into the public water system.

Our staff is well trained in emergency response procedures and we maintain close working relationships with the Orange County Health Department, other local agencies, the University and UNC Healthcare to keep informed about conditions and events that may affect our water or warrant investigation.

## Can OWASA get water from neighboring communities if needed?

Yes. Emergency interconnections and excellent working relationships among water utilities in the region are an essential part of ensuring reliable water supplies in an emergency or during scheduled maintenance. We have emergency interconnections with the City of Durham, the Town of Hillsborough and the northern Chatham County water systems. Through our connections with Durham, we can also receive drinking water from the Town of Cary. If necessary, OWASA can receive enough drinking water from Durham and the Town of Cary to meet the average daily needs of the community under most conditions.

## Comments or questions?

I hope the information above is helpful for understanding some of the key aspects of our work and how the OWASA team works to provide a safe, reliable water supply to all our customers. If you have questions or want to give OWASA feedback, we welcome you to contact us at 919-968-4421 or [info@owasa.org](mailto:info@owasa.org).