



**TO:** Customers of Scotts Valley Water District  
**FROM:** Charles McNiesh, General Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Explanation for Coliform Bacteria Tests  
**DATE:** November 23, 2009

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Scotts Valley Water District recently mailed information to its customers related to two water samples drawn on September 15, 2009. These two water samples were drawn as part of the District's regular weekly testing program and showed presence for coliform bacteria. Coliform bacteria are not necessarily harmful but presence is used to indicate the potential for development of harmful bacteria.

Six follow-up samples were drawn immediately in response to the positive lab results. These all tested negative, contradicting the previous results. Routine weekly sampling before and after the incident also showed no other positive lab results. Several factors suggest lab error or contamination during the sampling process caused the irregular positive test results, though this conclusion cannot be confirmed with certainty. These factors include lack of other positive test results before or after the event, similar irregular positive test results at the same lab for another water district, and measurement of free chlorine residual in the District's distribution system at all sampling events, including those on September 15, 2009. Chlorine is very effective in biological control, and the presence of free chlorine residual implies coliform bacteria presence would be highly unlikely.

The California Department of Public Health (DPH), which oversees state drinking water programs, invokes specific notification requirements whenever positive coliform test results are received. Individual customer notification is required even when there is a strong likelihood of lab or sampling error. Accordingly, DPH required Scotts Valley Water District to notify its customers individually by letter of the positive test results for the September 15, 2009, samples. We regret any unnecessary alarm caused by these letters, but we are serious about our mission to supply safe water and we strongly support DPH's efforts on behalf of public health and safety. Additional information on DPH programs may be found at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Pages/DWP.aspx>.