



## CLARIFICATION OF CAMPUS "POTABLE" AND "NON-POTABLE" WATER SUPPLIES

Traditionally, the term "Non-Potable" refers to water sources that are not safe for human consumption, i.e. not treated or tested. Examples include irrigation water, ground water, pond and surface waters, etc.

The water supplied to CU Boulder buildings comes from City of Boulder treatment plants and is considered potable. However, the *potable* designation can change depending on what the water is connected to and how it is used. For example, water in fire sprinkler lines becomes contaminated with materials from inside the piping and is no longer potable. Backflow prevention devices are used to keep contaminated / non-potable water from mixing with potable water.

Water supplies to CU Boulder research facilities, laboratories, and animal areas, have been divided into two service lines. One line is designated as *potable* because this water is protected with approved backflow prevention devices, isolating the water from equipment or operations having potential sources of contamination. The potable lines provide water to drinking fountains, bathrooms, kitchen areas, and office areas.

The second line is from the same potable, City source as the first line, but it is labeled *non-potable* because there is the potential for the water to become contaminated by the activities occurring in the campus's research, laboratory, and animal areas. This would include water supplied to laboratory and fume hood sinks, autoclaves, air conditioners, and other equipment. Although faucets and certain laboratory equipment are typically equipped with vacuum breakers or check valves, it is possible for the safeguards to fail, allowing contaminants to be drawn into that water service line. For example, if research staff connect tubing to a laboratory faucet and the tubing is submerged into contaminated water or chemicals, and the vacuum breaker was not working properly (or not present), then hazardous contaminants could be drawn into this water line and make it non-potable.

Although this risk of contamination is small, the possibility of unintentionally consuming or using non-Potable water does exist. Therefore, EH&S recommends that personnel do not use the non-potable water sources for drinking, making coffee, or as a water source for research animals.

Showers and/or eye/face wash units are required to be connected to a potable water source. However, the UCB Environmental Health and Safety Department (EH&S) may allow exceptions, i.e., connection to non-potable lines, if potable lines are not available and it is determined that the protection benefit outweighs the risk of having no emergency wash station at all. Such circumstances and exceptions must be reviewed and approved by EH&S and the Facilities Management Pipe Trades shop.