

Millions consumed potentially unsafe water in the past 10 years

By Agnel Philip, Elizabeth Sims, Jordan Houston and Rachel Konieczny, News21

WOLFFORTH, Texas – As many as 63 million people – nearly a fifth of the country – from rural Central California to the boroughs of New York City, were exposed to potentially unsafe water more than once during the past decade, according to a News21 investigation of 680,000 water quality and monitoring violations from the Environmental Protection Agency.

The findings highlight how six decades of industrial dumping, farming pollution, and water plant and distribution pipe deterioration have taken a toll on local water systems. Those found to have problems cleaning their water typically took more than two years to fix these issues, with some only recently resolving decades-old violations of EPA standards and others still delivering tainted water, according to data from the agency's Safe Drinking Water Information System.

Many local water treatment plants, especially those in small, poor and minority communities, can't afford the equipment necessary to filter out contaminants. Those can include arsenic found naturally in rock, chemicals from factories and nitrates and fecal matter from farming. In addition, much of the country's aging distribution pipes delivering the water to millions of people are susceptible to lead contamination, leaks, breaks and bacterial growth.

Experts warn contamination in water can lead to cancer, gastrointestinal diseases and developmental delays in children.

Read the whole story