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tive for coliform, another bacteria. It recommends testing for benzene if there were any burnt plastics in or near the well and for heavy metals if it is near a creek or stream.

"Because of the magnitude of the Camp Fire damage, the science for sampling and testing contaminated water for commercial use and for private wells is still being developed," said Lisa Almaguerr, spokeswoman for the county's Public Health Department.

While the March results are cause for caution and concern, Snyder says he anticipates the next round of testing—planned for this month—will yield lower levels of contamination. As water flows from higher elevations through the burn zone, it's naturally flushing the hazardous elements away. Before those results are known, however, which could be two to three weeks from now, he urges everyone—especially families with small children—to limit swimming downstream and within the Camp Fire burn zone and to test their shallow wells.

"We always want to make sure that people know when there are risks associated with swimming. Drinking that water or ingesting it can create problems. We urge an overabundance of caution until things start to stabilize in that area."

—Clint Snyder, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

"The biggest thing is caution at this point in time," he said. "This is a situation that's not common. Right now, it's just caution, caution, caution. And as for drinking water, folks should never be drinking untreated surface water."

—MEREDITH J. COOPER
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