Are you maintaining a safe rainwater tank this summer?

Summer in our region means sun, sand, surf... and storms. Is your rainwater tank summer-ready and safely maintained?

Residents are urged you to keep their rainwater tank safe this summer with regular, sensible maintenance.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) Director of the Public Health Unit, Dr Andrew Langley said using rainwater tanks involved low maintenance, not no maintenance.

"Like all drinking water supplies, rainwater systems need to be monitored; and the associated maintenance is not too onerous, but it is necessary," Dr Langley said.

"Monitoring your rainwater tank is an important responsibility, consisting of a range of visual inspections rather than laboratory testing of rainwater quality. Maintenance is needed to maintain good water quality and prevent mosquitoes breeding."

Here are the top monitoring and maintenance activities that will help you keep your rainwater tank system safe:

- Clean gutters (six-monthly and after storms)
- Clear first flush device of debris (monthly and after storms)
- Check for evidence of animal, bird or insect access (six-monthly)
- Check roof and gutters for accumulated debris including leaf and other plant material (six-monthly)
- Check and trim overhanging branches (six-monthly)
- Inspect and repair downpipes, check condition of the roof (six-monthly)
- Check tanks for sludge accumulation (at least every two to three years). If sludge is covering the bottom of the tank, siphon it out or completely empty the tank. Professional tank cleaners operate in many areas.
- Do not allow tanks and gutters to become breeding sites for mosquitoes.

"While rainwater is generally safe to drink providing it is clear, has little taste or smell, and is from a well maintained system, reticulated or ‘town’ water provides the safest and most reliable source of drinking water," Dr Langley said.

"Queensland Health recommends that residents should use town water supplies for drinking, personal hygiene and food preparation if they live in areas that have access to these supplies."

Dr Langley said that for most people, especially those who had been drinking rainwater for most of their lives, there would be very little health risk in drinking rainwater, provided the rainwater collection and storage system was well maintained.

"However, there are some members of the community for whom microorganisms (pathogens) when present in rainwater could pose health risks, including infants, the elderly and immune-
compromised people such as transplant, dialysis, HIV or cancer patients with severely weakened immune systems,” Dr Langley said.

“These people should consider disinfecting the water before drinking or cooking with it. You can do this by bringing the water to the boil and letting it cool before use.”

Rainwater may be used without further treatment for flushing toilets, the cold water laundry tap and for watering gardens and lawns as these uses generally present a low risk of disease.

For more information call your local council or visit www.health.qld.gov.au

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