

# Water Testing Scams

Worried about the safety of your drinking water? You are not alone. Fears about the purity of our water have increased dramatically in recent years, along with news reports of leaking landfills, corroding lead pipes, pesticide applications and faulty septic systems. These reports paint a gloomy picture of human wastes, pesticides, and other chemicals seeping into both well and ground water.

Although most households using water from private drilled or dug wells should have few concerns, potentially harmful contaminants have been found in some water supplies. If you have serious questions about the safety of your drinking water, you can take the suggestions described in this fact sheet to have your water tested and, if necessary, buy a water treatment unit. This fact sheet also warns you about some home water testing scams, where unscrupulous salespeople use scare tactics and fraudulent methods to sell their water treatment devices.

## Some Fraudulent Promotions

Not all companies offering water tests are legitimate. For example, fraudulent sellers that advertise "free home water testing" may only be interested in selling you a water treatment device, whether you need it or not. Because there is no charge for the "testing," you may be willing to allow a company representative into your home to check your water for impurities.

In doing the test, the representative may add tablets or drops of chemicals to your tap water, telling you the water will change color or particles will form if it is contaminated. When your water changes before your eyes, the representative may warn you that the water is polluted and may cause some sort of illness. The best solution, you are told, is to buy the company's water treatment device. You should understand, however, that even spring mineral water would "fail" the company's test.

Others will try to sell you a water treatment device without testing your drinking water or without even suggesting it be tested. They may offer water purifiers as part of a prize promotion -- notifying you, either by mail or telephone, that you have been selected to win an expensive prize.

To qualify for the prize, you are required to buy a water treatment device, costing hundreds of dollars. Unfortunately, you may discover later that both the prize and the water purifier are of very little value. And you probably cannot cancel your order or return the prize and water purifier for a refund.

If you are invited to participate in such a prize promotion, do not be pressured into making a decision on the spot. Ask for a copy of the offer in writing and read it carefully. Sometimes sellers will tell you that they need your credit-card number for identification or verification, while in reality they want your number to make unauthorized charges to your account. Remember, never give your credit-card number over the telephone to someone you do not know.

## **Some Cautions**

We suggest that you take the following steps before you have your water tested or you purchase any type of water treatment system.

*\* Avoid "Free" Home Water Tests.*

Offers to test the tap water in your home for free are almost always part of a sales promotion. More important, in-home testing does not provide the specific, in-depth analysis that is required to determine if your water needs treatment and what kind of system is suited to your needs. For example, in-home water tests may only check for acidity/alkalinity, water hardness, iron, manganese, and color, but none of these is harmful. Avoid dealing with salespersons who tell you strictly on the basis of their in-home testing that your drinking water is polluted, contaminated, or bad for your family's health.

*\* Be Wary of Claims of Government Approval.*

Fraudulent sellers use many different sales techniques. Some fraudulent sellers claim that certain government agencies require or recommend widespread use of purification systems. Others claim that the government has approved a particular method for in-home water testing. Still others claim that the government has approved or licensed a particular water treatment unit or purification system. All of those claims are false.

The government of Nova Scotia does not endorse water tests or water treatment products. If you see a CSA (Canadian Standards Council) or a UL (Underwrites Laboratories) label or registration number on a water treatment product label, it merely means that the manufacturer has registered its product with either group and has been approved for sale in Canada. A registration number does not mean the product has been tested or approved for a specific water treatment problem.

*\* Determine the Quality of Your Water Independently.*

To learn about the quality of your water, ask your local Department of Environment official for a brief overview of any water quality concerns in your particular community's drilled well water supply.

*\* Arrange for An Independent Test.*

If you have concerns about your water quality, have your water tested by a private laboratory that is registered by the Nova Scotia Department of Environment. To find out where you can get a list of registered laboratories, call your nearest environmental agency office or search our website at [www.neptunewatersys.com](http://www.neptunewatersys.com).

When having your water tested, deal with the laboratory directly if you can. Some fraudulent sellers ask for a sample of your water to send to an independent laboratory for testing, and then alter the sample to suit their sales needs.

You should understand that the costs of different water tests vary widely. Tests for bacteria range from \$15 to \$45, while tests for chemical contamination can cost hundreds of dollars, depending on the depth of the analysis.

*\* Decide What You Need.*

If tests on your water indicate problems, the next step is to determine what type of system you need to treat the water. This can be a difficult decision because there is a wide variety of water treatment devices on the market today. Water purifiers range from relatively low-cost, simple filter devices for a kitchen faucet to more expensive, sophisticated systems that treat water from its point of entry into a home.

Keep in mind, no one water treatment device can solve every problem. Some systems only soften water by removing calcium and magnesium, while others eliminate virtually all minerals and other foreign matter present in the water. Ask the testing firm or local government officials what kind of water treatment or purification system will suit your needs.

*\* Comparison Shop.*

Remember, first you need to identify the water problem, and then you need to shop for the right device or filter to correct the problem. Once you decide to purchase a particular type of water treatment system, you will have to make choices in terms of price, installation, maintenance, and warranties. To become familiar with the most commonly available treatment methods and devices contact several reputable water treatment contractors and ask for a quotation, outlining installation costs, maintenance schedules, warranties associated with the particular system and any return policies if you decide the water quality does not meet your expectations. Once your treatment system has been installed be sure to set up a testing schedule. Bacterial quality should be checked every 6 months and minerals at least once every year. Focus your mineral testing on known problems i.e. test only for those minerals that may be causing problem in your water. If your first test indicated high levels of iron, make sure to include iron on the next round. Use your senses as your guide. If your water quality changes drastically, you will notice it when you do your laundry or take a shower. Always keep in mind there is a possibility the quality of your water may change and your treatment system may need to be modified. A reputable treatment contractor knows this and will make slight adjustments as needed.