

# Test Water Every 3 Years

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Homeowners who draw their drinking water from a private well should have their water tested annually, said a Penn State researcher.

"The only way to be certain your drinking water is safe is to monitor it on a regular basis," said Dr. Paul Robillard, assistant professor of agricultural engineering in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

"To protect both family members and livestock, the water supply should be tested for bacteria and nitrates once a year, and for sulfates and pH levels at least once every three years," he said.

These tests provide an indication of the overall quality of your water, said Robillard. They detect possible contamination from sewage, manure, gas drilling, and mining activities.

A test for total coliform bacteria should be performed to determine whether sewage or manure has contaminated your water. A total bacteria count will indicate the presence of

other organisms not necessarily associated with sewage.

"All private water supplies should be tested for nitrates," said Robillard. "Excessive concentrations of nitrates can cause health problems, such as blue baby syndrome in infants and young ruminant animals."

Nitrates in drinking water pose a minimal health threat for adults. But the presence of nitrates can indicate that other highly soluble compounds are leaching into groundwater.

"Tests for sulfates and other dissolved salts also can provide an indication of the quality of your drinking water," said Robillard. "Excessive concentration of certain salts can cause gastrointestinal problems in humans and animals."

"Water with a pH greater than 6.5 or less than 8.0 is within the safe range," said Robillard. "Corrosion can introduce lead and other dissolved metals into drinking water. Excessive lead concentrations are a health threat to everyone."

Both low and high pH water can adversely affect cattle and

dairy cows. Low pH may increase problems related to acidosis and high pH may result in alkalosis problems.

In addition to monitoring private water supplies on a regular basis, homeowners also should test the water if there has been new mining or gas well drilling, a new water source developed, a change in the appearance, taste or odor of water, a change in a pump or plumbing, or a noticeable drop in dairy milk production.

For \$10, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources will test a water sample to determine whether it is bacteriologically safe. Information is available from a local DER office.

To learn more about water testing and to obtain a list of certified private laboratories that analyze water for private water supplies, request the free Penn State fact sheets, "Water Testing" and "Where to Have Your Water Tested" from your Penn State Cooperative Extension office in your county.

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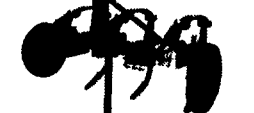
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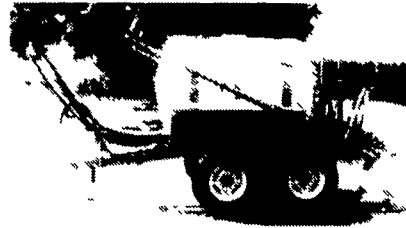
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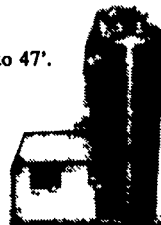
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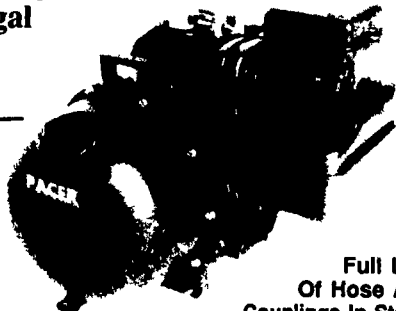
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