

Water

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summer, between 7 p.m. and bedtime," Jill Kryston said. "Sometimes we haven't had water until after midnight and have had to go to bed without baths in the hot weather."

Kingston Township is the only Back Mountain municipality to require homeowners within 150 feet of a public water system to use it instead of drilling a well.

It is also the only area municipality to require developers of subdivisions to either tie into an existing water system or drill a common well to supply its residents, an ordinance enacted last year, according to township manager Jeff Box.

Served by 14 small independent water companies, Kingston Township sees an average of 25 new homes, some with their own wells, built every year, Box said.

A community well owned by Cedar Lane Associates and operated by United Service Associates in Scranton supplies water for the neighborhood's 25 homes for free.

But the owner has applied to the Public Utility Commission for permission to charge residents \$700 a year for water.

When the system runs out or goes low, United Service Associ-

ates tells residents not to use the water outside at all.

"They have threatened to shut off anyone whom they find using water outside during a ban," the Krystons said.

For several months the subdivision was under a boil advisory, they said.

Kay Strickland's home is the first in the neighborhood to be affected by water system problems or pressure fluctuations.

Located in front of the pump house, her home is also at the development's highest elevation.

"I have learned to predict within 15 minutes when the water will run out," she said.

She also moved to Cedar Lane because developer Len Wallach said plenty of good, clean water was available.

"I took his word for it. Not being an engineer, I didn't know how to evaluate the system," she said.

During the 1991 drought, when residents were faced with the choice of either conserving water or trying to grow a lawn to control soil erosion, Strickland noticed that her water pressure was so low that her lawn sprinkler wouldn't work.

"They told me that there would be pressure fluctuations and it could be a storage problem," she said.

Things worsened until 1993, when the neighbors tried to get some help from the Department of Environmental Resources after experiencing five outages in July alone.

"DER accused us of watering our lawns," she said.

Neighbors have noticed a direct correlation between periods of high water use and low water pressure, Strickland said.

"A storage problem doesn't adequately explain our situation. There has never been a comprehensive system study. The only water meter is in the pump house - there's no way to prove that there might be a leak somewhere," she said.

In 1994, outdoor water use was rationed under an odd/even system, in which residents of odd-numbered homes could water their shrubbery on odd-numbered days and owners of even-numbered homes on even-numbered days.

"Even with rationing, there still wasn't enough water pressure to take a shower at 10 p.m.," she

said. Strickland is also concerned about access to water lines and the pump house behind her home. Maintenance workers must walk up her driveway and cut across her yard to the pump house because there's no right-of-way.

"The pump house is surrounded by trees and built into the side of a hill," she said. "There's no easement to get equipment in if a pump breaks down - they have to go in through Green Road and Mr. Gelso's farm, which adjoins us. It's a ridiculous way to access it."

The PUC held a hearing August 8 on the proposed \$700 yearly rate and has scheduled the next hearing for November 22 at 10 a.m. in Harrisburg.

Strickland wasn't able to testify at the August 8 hearing and won't make it to Harrisburg for the November 22 hearing, but has written the president judge many letters expressing her concerns.

"We're concerned that we could end up stuck with a system that has problems," she said.

Neighbors say that the water pressure problems are most noticeable on Breeze Way and the upper end of Tiller Road, the highest points in the development.

"It's not too bad down here," said William Wagner, a banker who lives on the lower end of Tiller Road, close to Manor Drive. "It's worse up at the top. Our main problem down here is dirty water."

Wagner has installed a water filter, which costs \$100 a year to operate, and has a home distiller in his kitchen.

It takes four hours to distill one gallon of water for the family to drink, he said. The distiller must be periodically cleaned with vinegar to remove mineral deposits.

"We don't want to take a chance," he said.

Like the Krystons and the Stricklands, Wagner has found

mineral deposits accumulating on spigots, fixtures and shower heads.

Strickland said that she could see water rates topping \$1,000 a year within the next several years, especially if the well's owners must make major improvements.

"I don't know where it will all end," Strickland said. "I don't want to continue losing my water. I have made my concerns known to the PUC, the township manager and DER, who says as long as I'm getting potable water, it's not their problem. Potable isn't the question - pressure and reliability are. I don't think we're being unrealistic. I would love to be part of the solution."

Water meeting draws sparse crowd

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

Organizers were disappointed that only a dozen people attended a panel discussion on water supplies and distribution in the area, sponsored by the Back Mountain Citizens' Council.

"Very few people want to do something about water until their wells run dry," said moderator Jim Ward of the Back Mountain Regional Water Commission. "Nearly 65 percent of the state's small water companies need major capital improvements to their systems, which could exceed \$45 million. Many are just barely hanging in. I know I sound like the voice of doom."

Featuring experts from the Back Mountain Regional Water Commission, Pennsylvania Gas and Water, General Waterworks, the Public Utility Commission, the Department of Environmental Resources and Wilkes University, the discussion was held at Penn State's Wilkes-Barre campus October 20.

According to Wilkes University professor and geologist Brian Redmond, PhD, water resources boil down to two questions:

Is there enough good water to supply our long-term needs?

Are we removing it from the ground faster than it is being replaced?

"In many cases, the answer is

"Very few people want to do something about water until their wells run dry."

Jim Ward
Moderator of water meeting

that we don't know," Redmond said. "There might be enough water, but we must test it to see that it isn't contaminated. In order to track water supplies, we must record the level of water in every well every day to establish trends."

Pennsylvania has only recently recognized water as a limited resource, a fact which Western states have dealt with for years, he said.

The panel outlined several water supply problems which the Back Mountain will soon have to face:

- One large system is much more efficient than the Back Mountain's present patchwork of 43 small private water companies. A larger system can deliver water more efficiently and keep rates down by spreading the costs among a larger number of customers.

- "In the water business, bigger is better," said Dave Kaufman, vice-president of water resources at PG&W. "You get better rates for buying supplies in large quantities."

- The Back Mountain's water systems can't simply be hooked together without major changes.

"Not all of the area water systems have the same size and type of pipes," said General Waterworks manager Mike Coyle. "They aren't compatible. And it's not feasible to connect to some of the smaller systems by extending a water line two miles to serve 20 customers."

Kingston Township manager Jeff Box suggested that area municipalities enact ordinances requiring water companies to use uniform pipe diameters and sizes, which would make interconnection easier.

- A massive public education campaign is necessary to make people realize that water is a precious resource.

"People don't understand what's involved in maintaining a steady supply with good quality, while replacing lines and equipment and keeping the system up-to-date," Kaufman said. "It takes a lot of money and a lot of manpower."

- "When you turn on the tap, your resource (water) suddenly becomes a waste product as it runs down the drain," Ward said.

- The growth of smaller water companies, particularly those in new subdivisions, must be curbed to prevent developers from sticking homeowners' associations with substandard, broken-down systems, as is happening in the Poconos.

DER and the PUC have begun to work together to encourage smaller water companies to merge and cut costs.

- A way to keep track of water supplies and water levels in area wells must be devised.

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