

Home Treatment Units Helping Solve Water Quality Problems

Is your water discolored or cloudy? Plumbing fixtures stained? Pipes corroded by acid water? Does your water smell like rotten eggs?

It doesn't have to be that way.

Brunswick County residents who rely on private wells for their water supply are learning that doesn't mean they must settle for poor quality water or unsafe water.

For years cities have purified and treated their water supplies; now home owners are doing the same. If advertising is any indicator, home water treatment units are in demand in Brunswick County.

Consumers consider buying home water treatment units for different reasons. Many may be concerned about chemicals or particles that affect the taste or appearance of their drinking water. Others may be concerned about safety, that their water contains harmful organisms or chemical pollutants.

All water quality control equipment costs money initially and also to operate and maintain. But bad water is also costly.

The first thing to do toward solving a bad water problem is to have the water analyzed, according to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

Water quality information is available from the local health department, in this case, the Brunswick County Health Department, and from private labs or treatment equipment dealers.

The N.C. Agricultural Extension Service recommends getting both a bacteriological and a chemical analysis.

County Will Test

Environmental health specialists with the health department will take samples of your water supply and send them to the state for testing for a small fee, said John Crowder, environmental health supervisor. Available are

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checks for the presence of E. coli, the coliform bacteria that may indicate the presence of sewage contamination; testing for pesticides when improperly constructed wells are located near areas of pesticide applications such as an old farm and may become contaminated; and inorganic chemical analyses such as those for pH, arsenic, lead, iron, manganese, chloride, flouride and hardness. The department will also test for sodium, or salt content.

Sometimes a dentist will specifically request a flouride check before prescribing a course of treatment.

Suspected contamination from underground petroleum storage tanks is usually referred to the N.C. Division of Environmental Management for testing, said Crowder.

Results are usually available five to 10 days after the samples are taken by the health department.

Some sellers offer a free in-home test of your drinking water if you call, notes the FTC, but may test only for a specific type of problem.

Choosing A Unit

Once problems in your drinking water are identified, you can select a particular unit designed to address your drinking water problem.

In addition to choosing a system appropriate to your water problem, you probably will

have opportunities to make choices in terms of price, installation, maintenance and warranties.

The FTC has produced a factsheet that answers questions a homeowner should ask before buying a unit such as:

- How do I know if I need a unit?
- What kinds of treatment units are available to address my home water problem?
- What are some selection options?
- How can I protect myself from deceptive sales practices?

Types of Systems: Common types of systems include physical filters, activated carbon filters, reverse osmosis or RO units, distillation units and ultraviolet or UV disinfection units. Each addresses specific needs and has its own merits and limitations. The box accompanying this article describes basic types of systems.

In addition to buying a treatment system that is suited to address your water problem, you may wish to take time to comparison shop for costs, cancellation and refund policies, installation methods, maintenance requirements and warranties.

Installation: Units may be installed under the kitchen sink or on the counter top or faucet. Some treat all water going through the tap or treat only cold water and deliver it to a separate faucet. Some dealers install units as part of the purchase cost and others charge separately if a professional must do the installation.

Water quality control systems need to be installed in proper sequence; information on types of problems, their symptoms and suggested treatments is available in a flyer from the county extension office or health department.

Maintenance: Proper maintenance of any system is essential for effective home water

treatment and some units require more maintenance than others. Ask before buying; look at an owner's manual. Once the unit is in operation, watch for changes in sediment, water pressure and taste that might indicate your filter needs replacing.

Warranties: If a filter comes with a written warranty take the time to read it before buying. Find out what parts and costs are covered and where you can get a replacement or a refund if you have problems with the unit. Ask where repairs can be obtained. If the unit must go to the manufacturer for repair, find out how long it usually takes and who pays shipping charges.

Consumer Protection: Most dealers are legitimate, but some may make misleading claims. If offered a filter as part of a prize promotion, check to see if a unit purchase is required. Be cautious about giving out your credit card number over the telephone for verification of eligibility or billing to an account. You could get billed for a different sum. Or you may find later that the units don't remove contaminants from the water, but you can't cancel the order or return the product for a refund.

If considering purchase of a water treatment device from a manufacturer unfamiliar to you, check with the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, 754-6644, or the state consumer protection section of the N.C. Dept. of Justice, 733-7741, to see if either has received complaints against the company. You can also contact the National Sanitation Foundation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, (313) 769-8010, which operates a voluntary certification program for water treatment products. It can't recommend a particular brand, but can provide information about treatment devices and technologies.

(System Should Suit Need, See Page 7)

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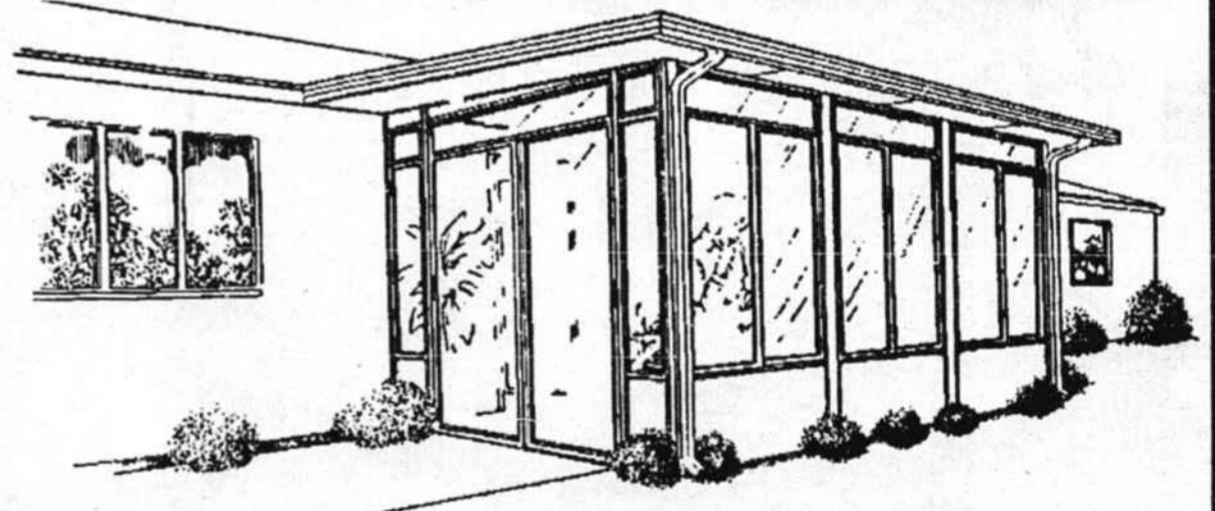
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