Testing Your Water

- Responsibilities of Owners of Private Water Supplies -

As a result of the Walkerton E. coli outbreak, the Public Health Unit is receiving unprecedented numbers of water samples for testing from owners of private water supplies. For that reason it is important for owners of private water supplies to know how the Public Health Unit can help them and what their own responsibilities are. Knowledge of how the process works will help ensure safe private water supplies.

The responsibility of maintaining a safe water supply rests with the owner of the private water supply. Follow these steps to ensure a safe water supply:

1. Collect water sample without contaminating the bottle or lid.
2. Deliver water sample to the Public Health Unit where it is sent by courier to a Public Health lab.
3. The homeowner will receive results by mail directly from the lab or may phone the lab for results. The Public Health Unit does not notify the homeowner of results.
4. Interpret water sample results: See attached fact sheet. When notified of questionable or unsatisfactory water sample results (positive for Total Coliform or E. coli), it is the responsibility of the owner of the private water supply to correct the problem. The homeowner can contact the Public Health Unit for advice. A public health inspector will interpret the water report and provide advice on well construction and treatment.

According to Jim Paton, Assistant Director of Health Protection, "We've been getting about a hundred telephone calls a day from owners of private water supplies. We're hoping that, by getting more information out through the media, people will be less frustrated by the water sampling process and better able to interpret their water results."

Interpretation of Water Sample Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Acceptable Limits</th>
<th>INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Coliforms per 100 ml of water</td>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>The presence of coliforms may be indicative of a contaminated water supply. Coliforms occur naturally in soil and decaying vegetation, but may also be associated</td>
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with human or animal faecal contamination.

Low levels of coliforms bacteria (1 to 4) may be tolerated in a private water supply provided at least 3 repeat samples have been taken over a six week period, the system is secure and not subject to contamination from other sources, and an attempt has been made to disinfect the distribution lines.

5 or more The persistent detection of more than 5 coliform bacteria from any drinking water system indicates an unsafe condition.

E.coli per 100 ml of water

0 Acceptable provided total coliforms are satisfactory (see above)

1 or more Water is considered unsafe for drinking if any E.coli bacteria are present. E.coli usually indicate faecal contamination from a human or animal source.