

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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June 13, 2011

“Norfolk Water Tests”



Norfolk water is clean and safe to drink. Still, once a year the Federal Environmental Protection Agency requires that the City of Norfolk water department officials publish and distribute a water quality pamphlet reassuring residents the water is well within the guidelines set up to protect water quality.

The Consumer Protection Report is sent to all residents of the city so that they are aware of even minute contaminants that are in the water.

According to Dennis Watts, City of Norfolk water division head, no water is absolutely devoid of any contaminants.

“The water is treated at our plant where most contaminants are removed. The water is safe to drink because what contaminants that are left are in such small amounts, they are not dangerous for anyone to drink,” Watts said.

The City of Norfolk’s water department has never had a problem with having more than the acceptable amounts of contaminants in the water it treats. It is tested regularly and sent to the State of Nebraska water department to be analyzed. The source for Norfolk’s water is groundwater while many large cities take their supply of water out of lakes and rivers. When water travels on top of or under the ground, it carries with it various chemicals and other naturally occurring contaminants.

There are other contaminants that the City of Norfolk tests its water for. For example, tests show that there are very small amounts of copper and lead in Norfolk’s water. This comes from the erosion of natural deposits. It may also come from the leaching into the water from household plumbing pipes made with copper or lead. The action level for copper is 1.3 parts per million (ppm) the City’s maximum amount was 0.645 ppm so Norfolk falls well within the safe guidelines for having copper in its water.

One thing that’s beneficial about the water in Norfolk is that it contains a lot of iron when it is pumped into the water plant for treatment.

“Our water is hard but the high level of iron and manganese in the water is good in that it coats our pipes and prevents leaching of the lead and copper from pipes into the water,” Watts said.

According to Watts the high amount of iron also works to neutralize the amount of arsenic in the water as the arsenic attaches to the iron molecules and then is filtered out.

Other chemicals tested for at the City of Norfolk Water Department are barium, chromium, fluoride, and nitrates. None of these substances have proved to be a threat to the quality of drinking water in Norfolk. Nitrates have been proven to occur in water samples near areas of runoff from cattle feedlots, but has not posed a problem for water in Norfolk.

There is naturally occurring fluoride in Norfolk's water. Voters have rejected adding fluoride to the City of Norfolk drinking water in the past. Still, it can and does seep in from natural deposits in the ground. It can also come from fertilizers applied to area fields.

Haloacetic Acids may be one contaminant that Norfolk water managers keep an eye on. This acid is a byproduct of the chlorine water departments use to disinfect the water. When the chlorine mixes with organic materials it forms a byproduct called Haloacetic Acids. Although Watts said they are not concerned about any water that Norfolk is currently providing its customers, there is always a question of whether the EPA will decrease the amount of chemicals that are acceptable in the water. If they do this, Watts said it could require a lot of time and expense in removing those minute amounts of contaminants.

"We are here to make water clean and safe for people to drink it. If the EPA chooses to lower some of these maximum amounts of contaminants allowed in the water, they should only do so as a result of very well thought out scientific research and not because of some one's political agenda," Watts said.

The Annual Water Quality Report will be distributed to Norfolk residents on June 15 as an insert in the Norfolk Daily News. It will show exactly how much of the various contaminants are in the water as a result of tests taken periodically from January 1 to December 1, 2010.

If anyone has any questions about the report, they're encouraged to call the City of Norfolk Water Department at 402-844-2210. The report will also be available on the website at <http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us>.