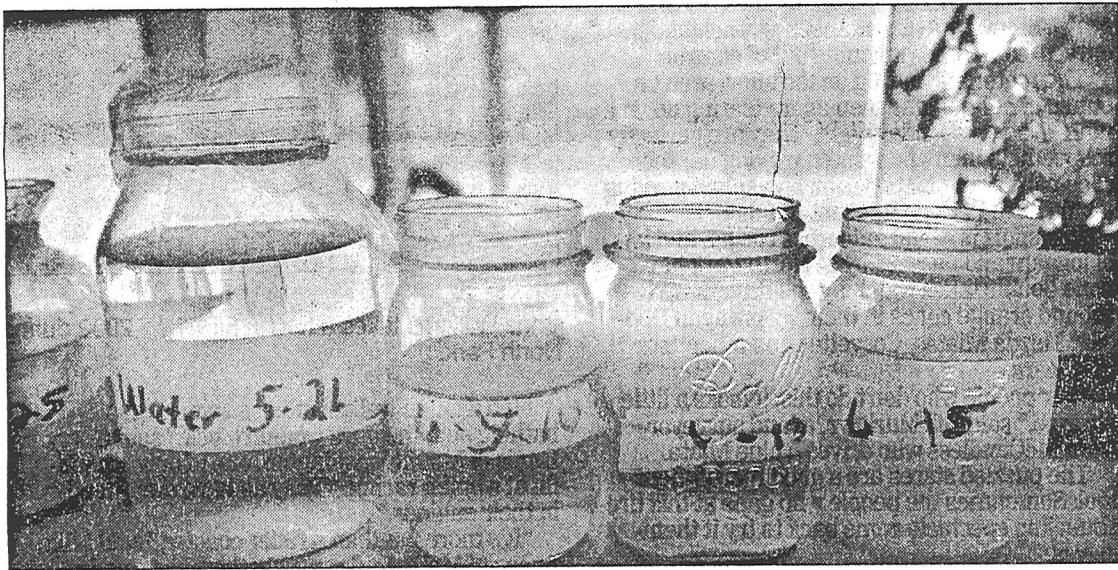




Above: Metal contamination in Karen Datt's back yard water well cost her the ornamental fish in her pond.



Left: Datt's kitchen window sill holds the record of contaminated well water in glass jars.

Bob Donaldson
Post-Gazette photos

Adams

House with bad well water, others aim to tap into Richland system

By Darlene White Natale

In April, Karen Datt was pleased to see that the goldfish in her small, plastic pond had survived the winter. She decided to give the fish a drink of fresh well water.

She turned on the hose and began some yard work on her Adams property. Moments later, when she went back to the pond, all of the fish were dead.

The water was frothy, the color of maple syrup. Datt's water had always been clear, but when she went into the house to further investigate, the kitchen tap oozed a molasses-like syrup.

"I called the well man and he took samples. His test kit wouldn't work because the readings were out of range," Datt said. She said the water didn't have an odor but it left a rust-colored, oily film in the sink.

"Whenever it touched you, it would burn your skin," Datt said. She said it doesn't have the texture of water, it feels more like a gel.

The Datts had the water tested.

Eugene Kramer of Butler County Water Conditioning reported that their water was not suitable for drinking, bathing, cooking or cleaning. He said when he analyzed the water, it was off the chart.

The only reading he could get was a 4.0-pH reading. Kramer said pH in the area ranges from 6.0 to 9.0, with the norm being 7.0. He told the Datts their water is so corrosive that it eventually would destroy the copper pipes throughout the house.

Kramer suggested the water be sent to the National Testing Laboratories Ltd. in Cleveland.

Its report April 25 showed very high levels of metals, including aluminum, copper, iron, lead, manganese, nickel and zinc. All exceeded standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

TEST RESULTS OF DATT'S WELL

An analysis of the Datt's well water found 12 pollutants in levels that exceeded recommended levels. The tests were done by National Testing Laboratories Inc., Cleveland.

The measurements are in milligrams of pollutant per liter of water.

Aluminum:

Detectable level, 0.1;
Recommended maximum, 0.2;
Level found, 13

Copper:

Detectable level, 0.004;
Recommended maximum, 1.3;
Level found, 5.5

Iron:

Detectable level, 0.02;
Recommended maximum, 0.3;
Level found, 14

Lead:

Detectable level, 0.002;
Recommended maximum, 0.015;
Level found, 0.046

Manganese:

Detectable level, 0.004;

Recommended maximum, 0.05;
Level found, 1.2

Nickel:

Detectable level, 0.02;
Recommended maximum, 0.1;
Level found, 0.23

Zinc:

Detectable level, 0.004;
Recommended maximum, 5;
Level found, 7.2

Sulfate:

Detectable level, 5.0;
Recommended maximum, 250;
Level found, 740

Hardness:

Detectable level, 10;
Recommended maximum, 100;
Level found, 640

Acidity/Alkalinity:

Detectable level, NA;
Recommended range, 6.5-8.5;
Level found, 3.7

Total dissolved solids:

Detectable level, 20;
Recommended maximum, 500;
Level found, 1,000

Turbidity:

Detectable level, 0.1;
Recommended maximum, 1.0;
Level found, 59

The EPA-recommended limit on aluminum is .2, the Datt's level is 13. The analysis indicates physical factors at unusual levels, such as turbidity. The EPA set level is 1; the Datt's level was 59. The dissolved solids in their water were double the EPA standard.

Datt sent a letter to Adams officials May 4, pleading for public water.

In June, Datt received what appeared to

be good news in a letter from James McKennan, chairman of the Richland Municipal Authority. He said the authority made a proposal to Adams Township to provide the Datts with water from a Richland waterline that is near the Datts' land.

If it's acceptable to Adams, the Datts could tap into public water this fall.

Adams homeowners want Richland water

WATER FROM PAGE N-9

McKenna said the authority would allow Adams to extend the Richland line to serve the Datts and other homes on Butler Street Extension. He said the authority would handle the extension as it would any contractor. "They build it and deed it over to us and we will tap the people into the line."

McKenna said that when Adams extends its main line down Ridge Road from John Quincy Adams Estates, "They will take over these Adams customers and we will deed the main line back to them."

"I imagine we will supply them with water for a couple of years," McKenna said of the homes on Butler Street Extension.

He said after the line reverts to Adams, a cross-connection would exist between the systems for emergency uses, such as a line break.

He said the Richland authority had supplied water to Valencia in Butler County since the late

1970s when a supply problem arose. Butler Street Extension is just outside Valencia.

"The ball is in the Adams Water Authority court now," McKenna said.

So on June 20, Datt and her neighbors attended the Adams Water Authority meeting.

Adams Water Authority engineer Don Warnick said Richland had agreed to letting Adams extend off their line but that there were some legal stumbling blocks. Warnick also said he would like to see more residents participate. Out of 15 homes on Butler Street Extension, four have said they want public water and another four have declined the service.

Datt, who has lived in her home for 40 years, said her family has been hauling in water and bathing at relatives' homes. She said she just bought a 1,500-gallon tank to store water in her garage.

Warnick said Adams wanted the Datts to get public water service.

"We have to work out some details," Warnick

said. He said if Adams builds the main line, it must recover some money, and that Richland wants to restrict the usage to those few homes. He said they would be meeting this week to work out the details.

"I know I'm just one little person," Datt pleaded, "but I need help."

Mike Watson of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection water management office in Pittsburgh, said he spoke with Datt about her water.

Watson had not yet reviewed Datt's test results but said that the pH that she reported was a reading that might be produced by mine discharge.

"I don't think it's right that she can't use her water. Something is causing it. It would be good to have some mining or water quality people looking at it," Watson said.

Darlene White Natale is a free-lance writer.

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