

Your Water: To Filter or Not to Filter

Water flows into your home in one of two ways: through public water systems or private well systems.

Public water systems are required to periodically monitor that safe drinking water is provided at all times. But it is up to individual homeowners to ensure that private domestic supplies are safe to drink by having their water tested annually.

Several types of home drinking water treatment devices can be used to provide safe drinking water. The treatment options vary in both complexity and price. The less informed you are about the quality of your water, the more likely you are to purchase unnecessary, costly, or inappropriate equipment. That's why testing is so necessary.

What are home drinking water treatment devices?

Home drinking water treatment devices are categorized as either "point-of-entry" devices, which treat all the water entering the home, or "point-of-use" devices, which treat only the water at a single tap. Common types of point-of-entry devices are water softeners, which remove hardness from the water, and whole-house filters, which remove contaminants. Point-of-use devices are particulate filters for turbidity (sediment) removal and activated carbon filters for removal of taste and odor problems. Keep in mind that it's not always necessary to treat water for household washing and sanitary purposes to the same degree as water used for drinking and cooking.

How do I know if I need a treatment device?

Water problems can be described as aesthetic issues affecting taste, color, and odor (but not necessarily harmful), and health/safety problems that are not apparent unless the water is tested. Most complaints about drinking water concern aesthetic problems, particularly taste and odor. Public water systems are required to maintain safe drinking water that does not exceed the maximum contaminant levels for primary contaminants. As public water suppliers in Illinois must meet stringent re-

quirements for physical, chemical, and biological contaminants, there is normally less need to be concerned about the quality of public water than there is for private wells.

Most people are unaware that Barrington's public utility service goes to great lengths to treat and filter the water that we use. In fact, in 2002, they installed an iron-filtration plant at a cost of \$2 million to provide customers with iron-free water. Consumers in Barrington who have questions about their public water supply should contact the Village of Barrington Public Works Department at 847-381-7903.

Deciding whether or not a home treatment device is needed for aesthetic improvements is fairly simple. If you're routinely using bottled water instead of your home's tap water, then you're obviously not happy with your water and some sort of treatment device is in order. Unfortunately, deciding whether or not you need a home treatment device to improve the safety of the water is not as easy. Harmful contaminants, if present at all, may only be present in small concentrations, which cannot be readily detected by taste and smell. Therefore, where a health/safety problem is suspected, it is essential that the water be analyzed by a laboratory to determine what contaminants, if any, are present and in what concentration. Buying a water treatment device without water testing can be a costly mistake.

How do I select a laboratory for testing?

An Environmental Protection Agency-certified lab should be used for drinking water testing. You can find list of laboratories at www.epa.state.il.us/about/locations.html.

A water treatment professional can also assist you in obtaining a laboratory test. To avoid a conflict of interest, it is imperative that the test results are obtained from an independent laboratory who has no affiliation with the water treatment supplier. This will ensure you will receive the most reliable results. It's critical to eliminate the poten-



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tial conflict of interest that has plagued the water treatment and conditioning industry.

By testing your water and installing the appropriate water treatment device, you'll ensure that your family always has safe, good-tasting water to drink. 