

WATER QUALITY IS NATIONAL NEWS, IS OUR WATER SAFE?

By Pat Kittle

Township Supervisor



This article will hopefully help clear up any concerns about the quality of the Township's public water system and encourage those on private wells to get them tested.

Providing clean drinking water is one of the most important public services. Most of us take the water we use to drink, bath and cook for granted ... simply assuming the water is safe. But the fact is water quality issues can arise seemingly from nowhere causing smell, odor, taste or worse yet, health issues that require immediate attention. Independence tests its water regularly to ensure quality and safety standards are maintained.

TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY WATER SYSTEM:

To address one of the biggest misunderstandings from folks I talk to is that our community's water is NOT supplied by Detroit (now the Great Lakes Water Authority). Nor is it supplied by the Flint Water Authority ... as I have been also asked numerous times. In Independence, our water is pumped from giant aquifers hundreds of feet deep beneath the Township. It is filtered to remove naturally occurring impurities and then treated with chlorine as a disinfectant. In fact, over \$20M was invested a few years back to upgrade the filtration systems at our community wells to meet more stringent standards for arsenic (50 PPB reduced to 10 PPB) and other naturally occurring elements. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets the regulatory limits for the amounts of certain contaminants in water provided by public water systems. The testing schedules for community wells are jointly set by both the EPA and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) for public water supplies such as ours.

And the really good news, the Independence Township public water supply has consistently passed all mandatory testing for regulated contaminants, as required by the EPA and MDEQ. Arsenic levels are below the mandated Minimum Concentration Level averaging between 0 and 6 ppb. PH testing is also done regularly with Independence community water supplies averaging 7.4, meaning no additives are needed to negate any acidity in the water. Although Independence has been in full compliance with Federal and State law, we have recently expanded our testing to include contaminants up and beyond what is required by the EPA and MDEQ to help provide further assurances of safety and instill confidence with the 6,300 folks using our public water system.

As you may recall, the MDEQ has determined a local service station located on Dixie Highway near Maple Drive was leaking fuel, creating an underground gas plume dating back to 2003. After a resident complained to the County Health Department of the bad taste and smell of their water, it was confirmed this private well on Maple Drive showed traces of the gasoline additive methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE). Further site testing on Maple identified varying

lower trace amounts of MTBE in over 30% of the other wells in the same neighborhood. Once we learned about this, the Township quickly set out to make sure none of these gasoline based contaminants had leached into any of our public wells serving the 6,300 water customers in the community. The expanded testing, completed in December 2015, showed the Independence community water system with zero traces of these new petroleum based contaminants. Because underground gas plumes move over time, this higher standard of testing is now the norm in Independence with evaluations occurring quarterly.

MAPLE DRIVE WELLS:

The MTBE discovered in the wells on Maple Drive is a gasoline additive that was used to enrich the fuel with oxygen to raise the octane level of gasoline. It appears that the gasoline leaks in question had this additive in the fuel which was banned in 2007 as a carcinogen. Even though the leak occurred over 12 years ago, 9 of the 26 private wells along Maple Drive tested positive for MTBE. The Township worked closely with the MDEQ on this matter and a grant for \$426,000 was awarded to the Township to clean up Maple Drive. As of October 2016, a new water main was installed the entire length of Maple Drive. At this writing, the residents of the 9 contaminated wells and 6 other residents with private wells on Maple are now connected to the Township water supply.

7,200 OTHER PRIVATE WELLS:

That's about how many private wells exist in our Township. Unlike our public water supply, private well systems do not fall under the same regulations set by the EPA. It is the homeowner's responsibility to schedule a private well for inspection to make sure their drinking water is safe. It's vital for owners of these private wells to understand why such testing is important.

The MDEQ currently lists 12 "active" Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) sites in Independence Township dating back to the late 90's. That is, sites where a gasoline or some other chemical leak has occurred, where the suspect underground tanks may have been replaced / removed, but remediation has not been fully completed. One of these still active LUST sites is believed to be the source of the Maple Drive problems according to the MDEQ.

The map below shows the 12 LUST sites affecting Independence as identified by the MDEQ. With 6,300 residents being on the Township community water supply, that leaves close to 7,200 residential and business properties that are on private well systems. With the MTBE issue taking 12 years to manifest itself on Maple Drive, we want to make sure the other gas plumes from the other LUST sites aren't negatively impacting ground water in your neighborhood. It is estimated that over 1,100 residents who live in the circled areas on the map have private wells. SPECIAL NOTE: The point to point distance from the alleged source of the Maple Drive well contamination to the far end of Maple Drive is almost 1/2 mile. This was the only criteria used in determining the size of the rings around the LUST sites. The MDEQ and the Township currently have no actual data to show *if* and *how far* these other plumes have moved over time. It is not known if this Maple Drive plume extends any farther than the homes

affected at this time. If we find evidence any gas plume has moved outside the highlighted ring, effected residents will be notified immediately.

GET YOUR PRIVATE WELL TESTED!!!

While we are currently unaware of other instances of contaminated wells near any of these other LUST sites in the Township, considering how the gas plume moved on Maple Drive, the Township strongly suggests you get your private well water tested on a regular basis. Although the Township isn't responsible for testing private wells or ensuring that they are producing safe drinking water, we understand that the available methods for getting the tests performed is not readily known. So the Township would like to help make it a little easier. If you have a private well and your home or business falls within or is near one of the active LUST sites, you can call the Township DPW at 248-625-8222 and schedule a time for one of our trained staff to come out to help you take the water sample and send it to the State for testing. Appointments will be made in the order of the call received. According to the MDEQ, it should take a couple of weeks to get your results. The State of Michigan DEQ charges \$120 for this test... \$100 for the Volatile Organic Compounds (MTBE) and \$20 for Arsenic. The Township is not making a dime on any of this. Payment will be required before your completed sample will be shipped.

SPECIAL NOTE: To date, over 100 residents did contact the DPW and had their wells tested with ZERO trace amounts of MTBE detected.

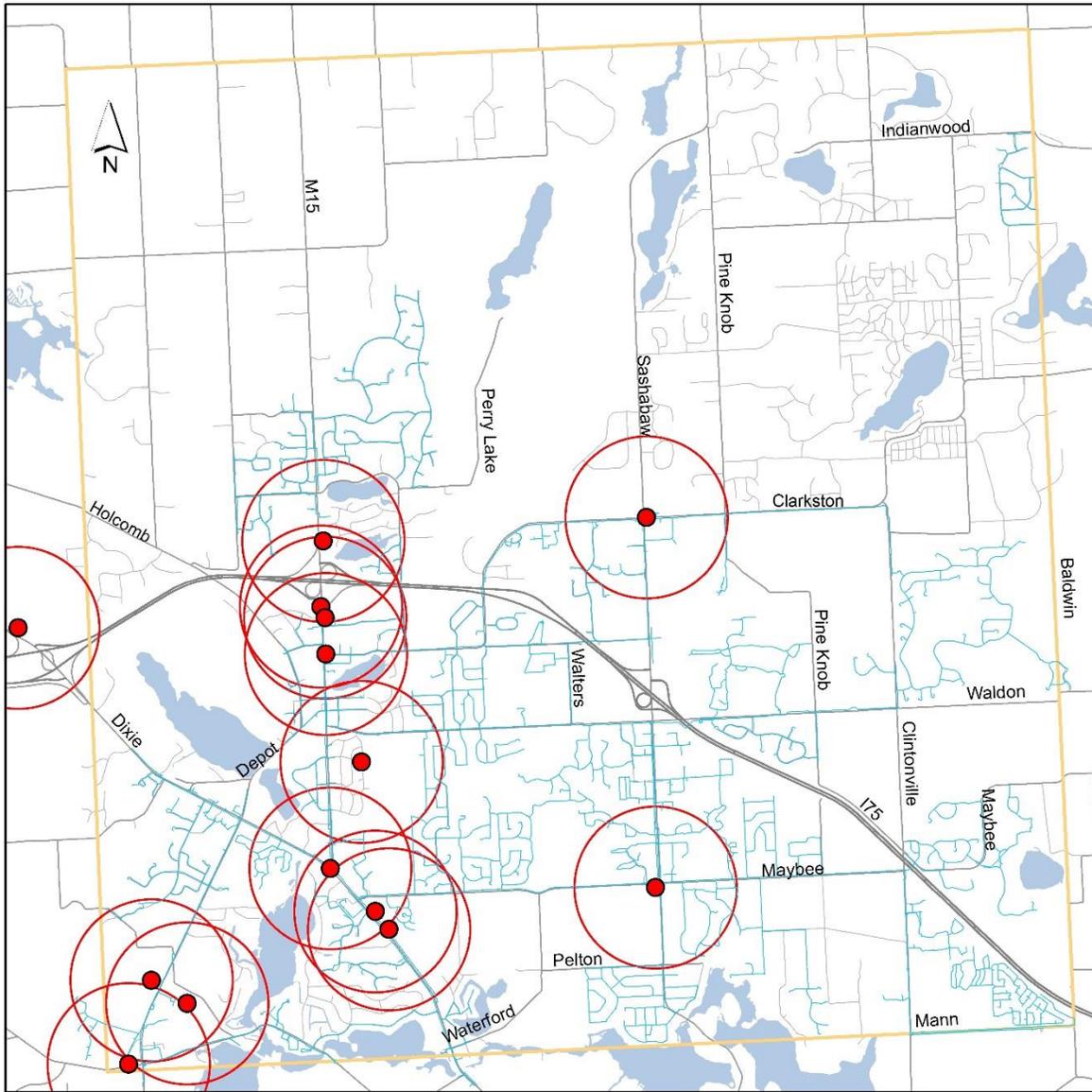
Just like you get your furnace checked before the winter months to make sure it is running safely and at top efficiency, please make sure you get your private well checked on a regular basis.

IN CLOSING ...

Any time you bring up a sensitive topic such as water quality, you run the risk of being either the guy "who cried wolf" or the guy "who should have acted sooner". This office would rather be proactive in matters like water quality that effect the health, safety and welfare of our residents. Please call the DPW for an appointment and get your well tested.



Leaking Underground Storage Tanks



Legend

- Leaking Underground Storage Tank
- Road
- Distribution Main
- ▭ Municipal Boundary
- ▭ Lake
- ▭ 1 Mile Buffer

