

Misleading Water Testing Sales Tactics

Citrus County residents continue to receive mailers and calls offering free in-home testing from a home water-treatment company. Citrus County Utility would like to remind its customers that the utility does not make contact by mail offering free water inspections. Listed below are some common sales tactics home water-treatment sales people use once they get inside your home:

The Sludge Test

The sales person asks you to run some tap water into a bottle. He then adds a few drops of an unnamed chemical, probably a flocculating agent (which combines with dissolved minerals and causes them to precipitate). An unattractive sludge forms and settles to the bottom of the bottle. Of course, you are surprised and the salesman looks concerned, but fails to mention that the chemical visually exaggerates the presence of harmless minerals.

The Washcloth Test

The sales person asks for a clean washcloth. The salesman produces a container of "treated" water, stuffs your washcloth in, shakes it and, presto, residual detergent is released from your clean washcloth and forms a layer of suds on the surface of the water. The point of this hocus-pocus is to show you how your "raw, untreated water" keeps your washer from getting your clothes clean. In fact, it's normal for garments to retain some detergent when washed in un-softened water. Such a small quantity of detergent is harmless, so the test is meaningless.

The Electric Precipitator

Some unethical operators use a more dramatic demonstration with an "electric precipitator." This machine resembles a coffee pot in which two metallic electrodes (metal rods) are placed. The demonstration produces a dark sludge, which is caused by electricity decomposing the rods. The device is a sham, but it is a convincing sales tool because of its visual shock effect.

"EPA Approval"

The EPA does not "test," "approve," "disapprove," or "recommend" water treatment devices. An EPA number is assigned if a manufacturer claims that the device inhibits or reduces bacteria in the water or on the filter. Some ratings of water purifier devices and manufacturers are done by the National Sanitation Foundation, a non-profit organization, and the Water Quality Association, a trade association.

A seller may claim the water purifier completely removes a variety of contaminants, such as bacteria, salmonella, chloroform, radon, arsenic, lead, mercury, pesticides, solvents, and asbestos. No single home water purification system is capable of removing all contaminants and most of these contaminants are both time consuming and expensive to analyze. In other words, tests for most potentially harmful water contaminants cannot be done in the home.

Customers may be told that the filtering system is virtually maintenance free, or that a filter will last 12 to 15 months. Not only are claims about minimal maintenance false and misleading, they can create a potential health threat if they are taken seriously. Regular maintenance of any water treatment system is critical to its effectiveness. Inadequate cleaning and/or failure to replace the filtering parts of the treatment system may create serious health hazards because bacteria and other contaminants become concentrated in the filtering system.

Typically, water filtering systems are not necessary for residents and businesses that rely on Citrus County Utility's tap water. Safe Drinking Water Act standards ensure that consumer drinking water is safe. People who have medical conditions that could put them at special risk should discuss the need for a water filter with their doctors. If you choose to install a home water filter, it's important to make informed decisions.

Please utilize the following checklist as an educational tool to help residents make informed decisions:

- ✓ Should you invite a sales person to come to your home, set a specific time and date, ask what type of vehicle he or she will be arriving in, and ask to see some company identification, upon their arrival.
- ✓ If the sales person identifies a "water problem" in your home, do not panic. Find out what it is and contact your water utility as soon as possible for confirmation. IMPORTANT!! Testing for most potentially harmful water contaminants cannot be done in the home.
- ✓ If you decide to purchase, get information about the product in writing before you agree to buy, and "sleep on it" before purchasing anything. Beware of any sales person who says that the offer is only good if you sign right now.
- ✓ A home water treatment system is NOT maintenance free. Water treatment systems MUST be maintained for water quality safety, and maintenance costs can be expensive. Inadequate cleaning and/or failure to replace the filtering parts may create serious health hazards because bacteria and other contaminants become concentrated in the filtering system.
- ✓ Check the company's record with the Better Business Bureau.
- ✓ Don't buy something merely because you'll get a "free gift."
- ✓ Don't give out cash because a credit card gives you some power to dispute the charges.
- ✓ Don't give your credit card number to anyone who calls on the phone.
- ✓ Don't purchase any product if you are being pressured to buy!
- ✓ If your utility ever needs to collect a water sample from your home, utility personnel will identify themselves and the reason why a sample is needed.
- ✓ MOST IMPORTANT!! It is a crime for someone to falsely report that your water supply is contaminated. If you are told this, get it in writing and then contact Citrus County Utilities at 352-527-7648. We will work with you to determine if the alleged contaminate is present or even harmful.