

LEWISTON-PORTER

Bacteria, not N-wastes, foul wells

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NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU

LOCKPORT — Most of the well water in the Lewiston-Porter area is undrinkable, but because of bacteria, not contamination from a nearby atomic dumping ground.

That was the conclusion of a Niagara County Health Department study released last week.

"Bacteria's pretty prevalent in the environment," said Ronald Gwozdek, principal public health engineer for the Health Department.

Public Health Director Paulette M. Kline launched the study after a public meeting in late 2004 at which speakers claimed that leaks from the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site off Balmer Road in Porter were contaminating the ground water.

The site contains radioactive wastes from the World War II atomic bomb project and later nuclear production.

The study found only 19 of the 117 wells in Lewiston and Porter in active use. The owners of 13 of the active wells agreed to have their water sampled last September.

The tests checked for bacteria, heavy metals and evidence of radioactivity and chemical pollution.

Results showed that water in 11 of the 13 wells was unsafe for human consumption because of coliform bacteria.

"If there's coliform bacteria, you need to disinfect your well," Gwozdek said.

Slightly elevated levels of lead, chloride, phenol, manganese and arsenic were found in one well each, but in all cases the amount only slightly exceeded safety thresholds set by state and federal environmental agencies.

Gwozdek said most could be explained readily.

"Arsenic is typically naturally occurring anyway," he noted, adding that the safety threshold for arsenic recently was lowered and the sample would have been deemed safe at the time it was taken.

The well with high chloride levels was within 10 feet of a road, and Gwozdek speculated that road salt runoff was responsible. The elevated lead sample was found in a well that was nearly dry, and sampling pulled in a large amount of sediment.

"Manganese isn't a health concern," he added. "It's more of a fixture-staining concern."

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