

Private Well Contamination in Plumstead Township Update: September 16, 2010

Status of pond water removal

Both ponds have been emptied by DEP's contractor, Tetra Tech. Work began Monday, September 13, to remove pond water that has been stored in tanks on site.

Tetra Tech will scrape approximately a foot of sediment from the ponds and stockpile it at the site until it can be tested and properly disposed. DEP is awaiting soil sampling results from areas around the ponds. The liners of both ponds will be replaced.

PA Department of Health review of sampling results

In response to DEP's August request for a health evaluation, the Division of Environmental Health of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) reviewed groundwater sampling data for private wells in Plumsteadville. The water samples were obtained by the Bucks County Health Department (BCHD) and analyzed by DEP. Upon completion of its review, DOH identified four contaminants -- benzene, antimony, arsenic, and manganese -- that are present in some of the wells at levels of health concern. While short-term exposures to these contaminants are not likely to harm the health of residents using their well water, long term exposures are potentially harmful.

[Concentrations of a fifth contaminant, benzoic acid \(dissolved sodium benzoate\) identified in private wells in August, were reviewed by DOH after its initial health evaluation. To date, benzoic acid has been found in four wells at levels of long-term health concern. Additional sampling in early October will be used to monitor its presence and concentrations.](#)

Residents whose latest results from Bucks County Health Department reported elevated levels of benzene, antimony, arsenic, manganese or benzoic acid may request copies of the DOH's health evaluations by contacting The Bucks County Health Department at 215-345-3318.

Water supplies

DEP believes that antimony, benzene, and benzoic acid (sodium benzoate) are suspected to have originated at the fire site at 5189 Stump Road. The extent of benzene and antimony contamination has been determined and addressed by providing safe supplies of water to the affected homes. The presence of arsenic and manganese in private wells is not thought to be related to the fire.

The Department is continuing to evaluate the need for long-term options for private wells that show an ongoing impact from contamination that resulted from the fire; such options could include replacing wells at the affected homes. Mindful of the effect of cold weather on the tankers that are currently providing temporary whole-house potable water, DEP has begun a plan to replace private wells that continue to show such an impact through Pennsylvania's Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act.

In the event that wells continue to indicate contamination from the fire, DEP anticipates that new, deeper private wells will be drilled, along with monitoring wells. The new wells would be pump-tested and DEP would continue to monitor their water supply for a period of time after they have been installed.

The need for well replacements will be determined by the Department on a case by case basis, and identified through ongoing sampling results from July forward. Homeowners whose wells are targeted for replacement will be contacted by the department's Environmental Cleanup Program, beginning with those that have been most impacted.

Additional news

The property owners of 5189 Stump Road on September 3, 2010 appealed DEP's August 5 order, which required them to address onsite and offsite contamination created by the June fire and to meet a number of deadlines for doing so.

Their appeal will be considered by the Environmental Hearing Board. This action will not affect DEP's schedule to move forward with investigation, remediation and providing affected residents with a long-term solution for safe drinking water.

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