

RECORD REVIEW

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— Don Keogh, homeowner

Manganese darkens Katonah water

By ABBY LUBY

Last summer, when resident Maura Gallagher filled the bathtub for her daughter, the water was black. “When it settled to the bottom, there was a dark sooty substance,” said Ms. Gallagher. “It looked like sediment, with tiny black pieces. We are still seeing it today, but it’s been sporadic.” Ms. Gallagher’s neighbors Mary and Don Keogh also discovered that their water was black at around the same time.

“Initially, when it first happened, it would literally come out a dark brownish color and you couldn’t see the bottom of the tub,” said Mr. Keogh. “Now the water is clear, but there is a residue once in a while.” Both families live on Mustato Road, and both called the town to see what was going on.

“The black water is due to manganese,” said Town of Bedford Water Department foreman Bill Nickson. “It will only clear up if we flush the entire system. But since the storage tank on Lily Pond Lane has been rebuilt, it is still off-line and is waiting to be filled. Once we do that, we can flush the system.”

In August, the Katonah well was taken off-line because of high manganese levels. It was the first time the well had been troubled with manganese. In September, it was treated for manganese, costing the town \$12,000.

According to Mr. Nickson, the Katonah well is expected to be in service in the near future. There was a similar problem at the Haines Road well in 1994, which was successfully treated by the town, and the well was put back online.

Ms. Keogh said that the town did flush the system twice since she first saw manganese in her tap water in the summer. “The water is mostly OK, but it will suddenly turn dark and clog the washing machine. The water department doesn’t know why it’s still dark. They told us they were flushing all of Mustato Road.”

The town’s engineer, Jim Hahn, was surprised that the Keoghs and the Gallaghers still had manganese in their water, especially since they flushed that part of Katonah.

“I’ve also heard from people who say they have no manganese,” said Mr. Hahn. “It’s surprising that there is manganese showing up, because we have been getting water from Mount Kisco, which is filtered. There’s no manganese in that water, and we have water coming from the Harris Road well and there is no manganese in that. They are all connected to the same pipe. Why some would have some and some would not is something I can’t explain.”

Mr. Hahn said manganese was a secondary health standard. “That means it can’t hurt you; it’s aesthetically objectionable in higher concentrations,” he said. “It depends on the concentrations of manganese people are getting. Hopefully, this is going to go away in a short period of time.” In Bedford’s 2003 annual water quality report, the appearance of manganese was listed as a violation occurring in the Consolidated Water District #1 community only; Mustato Road is in Water District #1.

The report cites the National Research Council, which estimated a safe and adequate daily dietary intake of manganese to be 2,000 to 5,000 micrograms for adults. The quality report goes on to say that “many peoples’ diets lead them to consume even higher amounts of manganese, especially those who consume high amounts of vegetables or are vegetarians. The infant population is of greatest concern.”

The report advised homeowners with detectable manganese in their water not to use the water to make infant formula, since it already contains iron and manganese. It also said that “Excess manganese produces a brownish color in laundered goods and impairs the taste of tea, coffee, and other beverages. Concentrations may cause a dark brown or black stain on porcelain plumbing fixtures. As with iron, manganese may form a coating on distribution pipes. These may slough off, causing brown blotches on laundered clothing or black particles in the water.”

But flushing the system isn’t that simple, said Mr. Nickson. Since the Lily Pond water tank had to be rebuilt in the fall, it remains empty, waiting to be filled within the next week or two. In order to successfully flush the entire water-pipe system, the tank on Lily Pond Lane needs to be full.

“When we flush the pipes, the water levels drop unless we have enough water,” said Mr. Nickson. “When the Lily Pond tank is full, we can blast the whole system. Blasting the whole system might solve the problem because the manganese tends to lay on the bottom of the pipes.”

Mr. Nickson said the manganese had come from the Katonah well and was still trapped in the main pipes. When six or eight of the main water pipes in the town are flushed, it’s usually done in the evening. Water is flushed through to opened hydrants on the street. Mr. Nickson said he was concerned with doing this in the winter, which might make the streets icy.

But Mr. Hahn wasn’t concerned about the cold temperature affecting any flushing.

“If it’s cold, we probably would flush into hoses, which would then go into catch basins, which would be adequate,” he said.

The Keoghs and the Gallaghers said they repeatedly called Town of Bedford supervisor Lee Roberts to see what could be done.

“We’ve done everything under the sun and spent a lot of money to correct the situation,” said Ms. Roberts. “Manganese is naturally decaying matter like dead leaves. We’ve had it in other wells.”

Mr. Keogh said he wasn’t satisfied with how the town was responding. “We are not getting a great feeling that the town is taking us seriously enough or if they have a good understanding of what’s going on,” he said. “When they tested the water, their first reaction was, ‘It’s safe to drink.’ They don’t know what they are talking about.”

Mr. Keogh said the town offered to pay for bottled drinking water. “It’s not standard policy — they’re not going around and offering it to anyone who calls with this problem. We haven’t submitted any invoices yet, but they agreed to it. My wife e-mailed the town yesterday, and they told her to drop off the invoices. I’ve lived here since 1988, and I’ve never complained to town about anything, but what concerns me is that we are not getting full disclosure of the problem.”

For town supervisor Lee Roberts, this problem is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to solving the town’s water problems. Earlier this year, the town was put on alert because of spiking nitrate levels in the town wells. High nitrate levels are due in part from septic leakage, and Ms. Roberts is pressing the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to move ahead on building sewers. The town still has few options for backup water sources, in case of emergencies such as high nitrate levels.

Ms. Roberts said Bedford can depend on other towns and other systems in a pinch, but ideally the town should be self-sufficient. “I’m very concerned about the water situation,” she said. “I met

with the DEP, and we discussed connecting to an aqueduct shaft from the Catskill-Delaware water pipe into the well, but if that happens, we may have to filter it. There's also cost to consider."