



NEWS AND INFORMATION

FOR PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIERS IN MINNESOTA

Shady Sales of Treatment Equipment Continue

MDH Responds to False Claims; Utilities Encouraged to Alert Residents

The Summer 2010 *Waterline* contained an article about water utilities in the region fighting back against shady sales tactics used to sell water treatment equipment to homeowners. Chaska water superintendent Dean Hylland got a call from a resident about a company that tested her water and said it wasn't safe, while implying that the company was working with the city. Hylland turned the matter over to the police department, which contacted the company with a warning about its operations. The police also contacted FOX 9 News, which placed a report on its web site that Chaska police and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension "are warning residents of an alleged scam to sell expensive water filters using scare tactics."

St. Paul Regional Water Services (SPRWS) addressed the issue in its Consumer Confidence Reports, including this text: "This past year, we received many calls from concerned customers approached by companies attempting to sell them water-related products, such as softeners and filters. These sales companies offer a free test of city water. Many of our customers believe these sales people are from SPRWS. Saint Paul Regional Water Services is not affiliated with any private business soliciting customers or offering any products or services for sale. According to descriptions from our customers, these companies claim that some substances exceed allowable limits for drinking water. These claims are false. If our water exceeds the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] or MDH standards for drinking water, we are required by law to inform the public."

Recently the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) received a complaint stating that a representative of a company selling water treatment equipment contacted a resident in Washington County, claiming that he was operating under an MDH grant to provide free water testing in people's homes as part of a research project. The resident agreed to allow the testing. The representative performed a few simple tests and then inaccurately claimed that the total dissolved solids concentration exceeded federal drinking standards and likely indicated the presence of

harmful contaminants such as atrazine and arsenic. The homeowner was told that the water posed "significant health risks" but that he could protect himself by purchasing expensive treatment equipment at a reduced price since the company could apply some of the alleged MDH grant money toward the cost of the equipment.

The homeowner contacted the MDH, which has **not** issued grants for this type of testing nor for the installation of private water treatment systems. The homeowner acquired some evidence of the company's fraudulent claims; this information has been turned over to local and state authorities for consideration of further legal action. MDH also issued a press release, which generated publicity about the scams, in October 2010.

Utilities hearing of such tactics and false claims taking place in their area may want to contact local law enforcement and local media in addition to warning their customers. Utilities may also want to encourage residents considering the purchase of a home water treatment system to:

- Contact their local water system for more information regarding their water quality. Residents with private wells may contact their county public health agency, the Minnesota Department of Health, or the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency regarding water quality in their area.
- Compare water treatment systems and prices.
- Work with a reputable company. If contacted by a company that says it is working with the city or state, ask for a contact person at that agency.
- Make sure the device is certified to achieve the results being claimed.
- Verify that the installation is done by a licensed plumber.

Those who believe they have been provided false or misleading information or that they have been subjected to unfair or high-pressure tactics in the course of a sales visit, should be encouraged to contact the Minnesota Attorney General's office Consumer Complaints Division at 651-296-3353 or 800-657-3787 or online at <http://www.ag.state.mn.us/Consumer/Complaint.asp>.