

SEDIMENT, IRON AND OTHER “SECONDARY” POLLUTANTS IN YOUR TAP WATER



CLEAN WATER FOR NORTH CAROLINA

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The Problem

North Carolina has many rural community water systems that rely on groundwater, which often contains sediment and naturally occurring minerals, such as iron and manganese. These substances can discolor water and lead to other household problems. Most community water systems in the state that rely on groundwater are privately owned and operated. Because **private, for-profit companies tend to take a “bare minimum” approach** to drinking water quality regulation, nothing is being done about “secondary” water pollution.



Is this Legal?

The national Safe Drinking Water Act classifies sediment, manganese and iron as “secondary” standards. There are guidelines for maximum amounts in drinking water, but they are not enforceable by law because the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) views these substances as **“aesthetic”** problems rather than health threats. EPA does allow states to adopt enforceable standards for these substances, but North Carolina has not chosen to do so. The NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) Public Water Supply Section requires water service providers to monitor these substances, but they do not have regulatory authority to penalize providers for secondary contamination of water.

Even if enforcement was possible, Public Water Supply Section does not have the resources to oversee all the small systems in the state. Water service providers are typically allowed to conduct and report their own self-monitoring and reporting, meaning it is up to them to report their own violations. ***This weak regulatory system does not hold utilities accountable for quality service to customers!***

The Cost to Residents

Having secondary pollutants in your water is more than just an aesthetic problem. Dissolved iron gives water a disagreeable metallic taste and appearance. Concentrations as low as 0.3mg/L will leave reddish brown stains on fixtures and laundry that are difficult to remove. Iron can also promote bacteria growth in pipes, which can form a smelly biofilm, clog plumbing, and cause an offensive odor.

Customers are not only paying for undrinkable water, they have **extensive out-of-pocket costs** as well. Many homeowners have to **replace filters and appliances**, which can be a major financial burden. In addition, many customers pay for bottled water—or consume less—to avoid drinking murky, brown, or bad-tasting water.



Tap water from a resident of Gaston County

The Bottom Line:

Water rates should not go up if these problems are not being fixed! Private, for profit water companies should be transparent about how they are using rate increases to fix problems.

We need stronger laws to hold water providers—especially for-profit companies such as Aqua NC and Utilities, Inc.—accountable for providing clean, clear water. North Carolina should adopt enforceable limits for substances like iron and color.

HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?

If you are having a problem with your water, even if it is not legally enforceable, **report it!** Take and send pictures and other documentation whenever possible.

1. Call your water supplier—the company that bills you

- ◆ Ask them to resolve the problem

2. Call NC Public Water Supply Section

- ◆ Call with unresolved water quality issues; send pictures!
- ◆ Request a copy of your annual water report
- ◆ 1-919-733-2321
- ◆ www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/pws/

3. Call the NC Utilities Commission

- ◆ Contact with unresolved questions or complaints about water pricing, notification, or service
- ◆ They may hold public rate hearings for proposed increases
- ◆ 1-866-380-9816
- ◆ www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/

NC's privatized water woes

Instead of encouraging connections to existing public water supplies, NC has allowed an abundance of small private systems and water resellers to fill gaps for many years. The NC Utilities Commission encourages corporate, investor-owned companies to buy up these systems, nominally to bring needed capital for infrastructure improvements to bring systems up to current environmental standards.

Private water companies are able to fully recover the costs of system improvements through high customer rates designed to deliver a certain rate of return on investments, and private companies are also eligible for public loans to finance improvement. Yet many groundwater systems continue to deliver water that most people would consider “undrinkable,” **despite frequent rate increases.**

There are two major national investor-owned utilities in NC: Aqua North Carolina (Aqua America), and Utilities, Inc. (purchased by Corix in 2012), along with many smaller private operators. Aqua customers pay a \$65 flat sewer fee, and have an average water bill of \$43. That's over \$100 per month—***much higher than what public water customers pay for water/sewer.*** (Those rates may increase again in 2014). Would YOU pay that much for water too unappetizing to drink?

Contact us!

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