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COMMUNITY

# How bad is the water, anyway?

■ Without the health report, no one can say for sure'

**Kevin Woodley**

*Peninsula News Review*

Some make frequent trips to the Co-op. Others have large bottles delivered to their homes.

For years, residents have said they can't drink the water on Senanus Drive in Saanichton.

So when the Capital Health Region began testing the area water last year, residents thought they would finally gain scientific ammunition for their fight with Central Saanich Council. It still hasn't happened.

"They've been promising a report since February," said Frank Towler, who lives on Senanus Drive. "They spent a lot of time investigating our problem almost a year ago. Then they told some of us over the phone not to drink the water. We haven't heard anything since."

According to Rob Bradbury, the Capital Health Region's chief environmental health officer, the report, which has already missed several informal deadlines, should be available sometime in late December.

"It's a relatively high priority," he said. "The process has dragged on longer than I wanted."

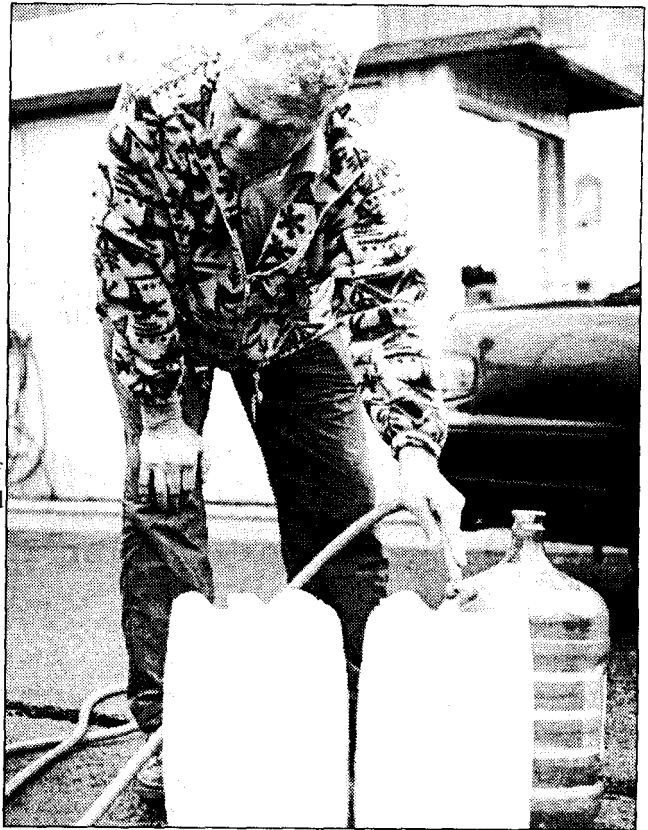
Bradbury still has to combine two different reports and data sets into one report that will make sense, but, he said, attempts to do so are constantly stymied by other work.

"Every time I try to get to it," he said, "other things keep popping up and putting it on the backburner."

Towler and his neighbors are tired of waiting for the report.

"If that report says you guys have very bad water, it helps us and it helps Council," said Towler. Senanus residents aren't the only ones frustrated with the lack of progress from the Capital Health region.

Central Saanich's Water Advisory Task Force, which was originally supposed to report to Council about Senanus and other water-related issues June 30, is waiting on the report before making any recommendations.



KEVIN WOODLEY PHOTO

**Larry Booth of Senanus Drive fills containers with fresh water from the Co-op gas station.**

"It's unbelievable that no one has seen it," said Michael M'Gonigle, chair of the task force. "We really want to feed the information to the council so they have options,"

# Senanus residents still wait for water

Kevin Woodley  
*Peninsula News Review*

For Irene and Larry Booth, trips to the Co-op gas station on Keating Cross Road are a twice-a-week occurrence.

But they don't make the trip to feed a gas-guzzling car.

The Booths drive 15 minutes from their home at 523 Senanus Drive in Saanichton to fill containers with the station's water because the water at their home isn't suitable for drinking.

'We're getting older and we're not going to be able to do this much

longer," said 71-year-old Larry Booth as he lifted a large blue container into the back seat of his car.

The Booths have lived on Senanus Drive for 13 years. Like many of their neighbors, they have access to a well, but can't use the water for cooking or drinking.

The main Mount Newton water line in Central Saanich doesn't reach residents of Senanus Drive.

According to Frank Towler, residents of Senanus have been bringing the problem to the attention of Central Saanich government for 25 years. In

the past two years, Towler and his neighbors have increased the pressure on Council, but they are frustrated with the lack of action.

"There has been lots of unfortunate fighting between Council and the community," said Towler. "I'm one of the few who has good water, but the problems get worse as you go west from my place, towards the point."

Towler shared stories of Senanus residents who, after a shower, have no water for hours. Others, he says, are having to replace hot water tanks on a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

## Senanus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

yearly basis because of high mineral concentration in the water. Of the neighbors who do attempt to grow gardens, most said the water was too hard for the plants to survive.

"The water is hard and it takes its toll on everything," said Towler.

Unfortunately for both residents and Central Saanich council, fixing the water problem at Senanus will be expensive. The estimated cost to extend the current water line on Mount Newton Road is \$800,000.

It is a lot of money in a time of shrinking municipal budgets, especially when the improvement affects only 50 residents.

Central Saanich Mayor Wayne Hunter said the costs are not a part of the district's five-year plan and added that he isn't sure that the Senanus

residents with a water line is a priority for other residents of the district.

"Is there a problem with the drinking water? Yes, in some areas there is," said Hunter. "But in other areas they have fountains and fish ponds."

Hunter agreed that a solution is needed, but doesn't hide the fact he doesn't support an extension of the area's existing water line. That's why he decided not to apply for a position on the Central Saanich Water Advisory Task Force when it was formed by Council in April, 1998.

Michael M'Gonigle took over as chair of the task force in September.

"The water situation at Senanus and in Central Saanich is part of regional issue," said M'Gonigle. "This group is looking at the larger picture. But Senanus is a front burner issue right now."

In the past two weeks, the task force has circulated questionnaires to residents of the

area and the results are now starting to come back. M'Gonigle said the process of investigating Senanus has been slow to start, but he hopes to have a report to Council early in 1999.

Like the Central Saanich Council, which split a vote over the issue of funding for an independent survey (both sides - Council and the residents - wanted the other to pay for the \$4,000 study), the Water Advisory Task Force has members on both sides of the debate.

With that in mind M'Gonigle instituted a scenario approach within the nine-member task force.

"With the different perspectives, we started the scenario approach to tackle the various options," said M'Gonigle. "Those on our committee who want a pipeline have to develop that scenario, including funding solutions."

Personally, M'Gonigle said he doesn't consider extending the pipeline a realistic option.

"Financially it doesn't work. Anything other than a local solution is very costly."

By local solution, M'Gonigle means ideas like using a community cistern for the area. It's an idea he has been investigating under the scenario approach after finding examples of successful cistern-supplied communities like Mill Bay.

It's just one option towards solving a difficult situation.

"Solving this problem will require innovative, cost effective thinking," said M'Gonigle. "The problem is we're used to thinking in terms of 'throw-money-at-it, big-engineering' solutions."

In the meantime, residents are getting tired of bringing in water from outside sources.

"Good water is one of the keys to good health," said Towler. "We all know that."