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 Select language **Central Saanich families desperate for water;  
 [Final Edition]**[Richard Watts Times Colonist staff.](#) [Times - Colonist](#). Victoria, B.C.: [Apr 20, 2001](#). pg. A.1.FRO**Other available formats:** [Abstract](#)**Find more documents like this:****People:**

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As well, drinking water is not the municipal service that makes high-density development possible, Denford said. A sewer system is the determining factor for that, and **Senanus** uses septic systems.

Peter Kittredge, a consulting economist by trade and a member of the municipality's water advisory task force, said he doesn't believe there are any problems with the **Senanus** water. He is suspicious of the motives of the **Senanus** residents when they ask for water.

Chris Denford, [Gordon Denford]'s son, who also lives on **Senanus**, asked the Capital Health Region in 1999 if it was safe to use the water to bathe his two-year-old daughter. He was told "no," and advised to retest his water. He and his wife now fill up jugs at friends' houses outside the area and then heat the water on the stove to bathe their child.

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They can't drink their water. Public health officials have warned against bathing babies with it. It rots pipes, tanks and taps. It even kills houseplants.

For about 150 residents of **Senanus** Drive in Central Saanich who all rely on well water, it's been more than four years of public- health warnings, consultants' reports, and discussions with three levels of government.

At every step of the way their local government, the municipality of Central Saanich, has blocked their attempts to get municipal water.

The local council even blocked attempts to get potable water piped in when **Senanus** residents figured out a way to get the job done at zero cost to the municipality.

Central Saanich Mayor Wayne Hunter said it's a longtime municipal policy to keep potable water away from people living on **Senanus** Drive. That way the municipality discourages future development.

"It's a longstanding policy of making sure the people are on wells and not having potable water down there," said Hunter.

The residents of **Senanus** Drive hope to convince the Capital Regional District to declare their neighborhood a "local service area."

That way the CRD can bring in water as well as apply for grants and loans to finance the cost -- estimated at \$850,000 -- regardless of the local council's fears about future development.

**Senanus** resident Gordon Denford has seen his hot-water heater rot through eight times in the last 10 years. He said he believes the municipality has acted without ethics.

"You are dealing with one of the most important factors of life - - clean water," said Denford.

Walkerton, Ont., where seven people died and 2,000 fell sick because of contaminated water in May 2,000, has shown citizens have a right to clean water, so for the municipality to use clean water as a means of controlling development is indefensible, he said.

As a developer himself, Denford said municipalities have zoning bylaws, development permits, building permits and a whole host of legitimate means to control land use. They have no ethical right to withhold potable water from people, he said.

As well, drinking water is not the municipal service that makes high-density development possible, Denford said. A sewer system is the determining factor for that, and **Senanus** uses septic systems.

Besides, said Denford, nobody on **Senanus** wants to start subdividing.

Frank Towler, another **Senanus** resident, said it has become plain to him that council is not satisfied with controlling the present, it wants to ensure development can't happen 50 years down the road.

"They are using water as a weapon for the future," said Towler.

Peter Kittredge, a consulting economist by trade and a member of the municipality's water advisory task force, said he doesn't believe there are any problems with the **Senanus** water. He is suspicious of the motives of the **Senanus** residents when they ask for water.

"They want water down there in order to develop it," said Kittredge.

"They want that (municipal water) because they are a development lobby," he said. "They are not looking for solutions because they are a development lobby."

According to Towler and Denford the water in the wells started turning bad in the early 1980s. Nothing was done until 1997 when the federal and provincial governments agreed on an infrastructure grant program.

The residents reasoned if the federal and provincial governments would each agree to pick up one-third, the remainder of the cost could be paid by residents through an increase on their municipal taxes over 15 years. The municipality would not be out of pocket, it would need only to make the application.

The municipality refused to forward the application for the grant, arguing there were more pressing infrastructure problems.

Since then the **Senanus** residents have had two reports declaring the water unfit for human consumption because of high levels of dissolved solids, heavy metals, salts and other substances that contravene Canadian standards.

One of those reports, completed in 1999 by the Capital Health Region environmental health department, declared the water unfit for drinking or

cooking.

"The groundwater in the **Senanus** Drive area should not be considered potable, is not palatable and should not be used for drinking water," the report stated.

Chris Denford, Gordon's son, who also lives on **Senanus**, asked the Capital Health Region in 1999 if it was safe to use the water to bathe his two-year-old daughter. He was told "no," and advised to retest his water. He and his wife now fill up jugs at friends' houses outside the area and then heat the water on the stove to bathe their child.

Contacted Thursday, the Capital Health Region stands firmly behind its earlier findings.

"We just know the water is not fit, that's our opinion," said Gary Gibson, chief environmental health officer.

The municipality formed its water advisory task force to study the issue. Presented with the health warnings, the task force hired its own consultant to retest the water. That report came back declaring the water fine.

According to Gibson, this is a situation where everyone is right. Test the water in the late summer when groundwater levels are low and the quality is awful. Wait until mid-winter when rainwater has diluted it and the quality is fine.

"(Water quality) goes up and down during the course of the season," said Gibson.

#### [Illustration]

Photo: Bruce Stotesbury, Times Colonist / Anne Denford bathes three-month-old Fallyn as sister Bronte, 2, helps out. She uses water from jugs for the baby's bath because of warnings about well contaminants. ;

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