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fishy water taste and smell

Fishy-smelling NC water annual occurrence

By Tim Omarzu - Sat, Nov 24, 2001

"Smells like dead fish," is how one Nevada City woman described her tap water Friday.

Another woman e-mailed The Union to report Nevada City's tap water was "fairly foul" Thanksgiving Day in a couple of locations.

City officials acknowledge the tap water tastes and smells funny now, but say they're working to correct the problem and stress the water's safe to drink.

"The water's healthy. It's safe. It's not going to harm anybody," said public works employee Jim Wofford.

The funny taste and smell is an annual problem when temperatures drop, officials said. They think it's caused by cold water algae that grows in sediment in the city's reservoir off Banner Mountain Trail near the city's water treatment plant.

Lining the reservoir with plastic or covering it with a floating liner are possible long-term solutions under consideration by city officials, said treatment plant operator Chris Towne.

The state Department of Health Services suggested those solutions about five years ago, he said.

In the meantime, the treatment plant has a machine that ^{add} adds activated carbon to remove tastes and smells. Workers turned it on this week and on Friday were increasing the amount of added carbon.

Still, it could take a month or two before the water tastes normal because funny-tasting and -smelling water is already in the city's three 1 million gallon treated-water tanks.

"I hope people in town are patient," Towne said.

Not everyone is complaining about Nevada City's tap water.

Tom Coleman, owner of the National Hotel, hadn't noticed any funny taste or smell Friday. And he hadn't heard any complaints from guests or customers in the hotel's bar and restaurant.

"No, I haven't noticed," Coleman said. "Of course, when you mix it with Scotch ..."

Nevada City didn't have a water treatment plant until 1978, when the chlorination plant and reservoir were built. Prior to that, residents' water came out of Little Deer Creek.



Nevada City Water Treatment Plant operator Chris Towne (left) discusses the city's smelly water with city employee Jim Wofford near a container. Robert Huggins