

Truro Water Resources Oversight Committee

Water Quality Monitoring Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Truro has begun a free Town-wide water testing project to detect nitrates in the water supply. Nitrates are a leading indicator of overall water quality. This program will cover a three-year period starting in 2007 and all residences in Truro will be given the option to participate. Participation is voluntary and the Town will notify each taxpayer of the option and timing of participation. You will hear from the Town by mail either this summer or in the Spring of 2008 or 2009. Upon reviewing the materials you can decide for yourself if you wish to participate. If you wish to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of your water quality you may do this at any time, at your own expense. Information on this is provided below as well.

Below are some Frequently Asked Questions (and answers) regarding the WQMP program.

How can I enroll for the water testing program? *You do not need to enroll for the water testing program. The properties to be invited for testing in 2007 have already been identified from tax assessor maps. If your property is not invited this year, you will be invited to participate either next summer or in the summer of 2009. It is your decision if you wish to participate.*

What areas will be tested in 2007? *We are testing one third of the town each year, so that the entire town will be tested by the summer of 2009.*

How will I know if my property will be tested in 2007? *If your property is invited for testing this year, you will receive by mail a sampling packet at the address at which you receive your tax bill. Most packets have already been mailed. All 2007 packets were mailed by August 27th. (Packets will be sent to the mailing address on file in the tax assessor's office.) The packet will contain instructions and a water sampling vial. After you collect your sample, you will be asked to drop it off at the Health Department in Town Hall.*

Does the Town need access to my house to do the testing? *No, the town does not need access. When your property is invited for testing, you will be sent a sample vial and asked to collect your own sample.*

What if I receive a sampling vial but I have already left Truro for the season? *If your property has been invited for testing but you have already left Truro for the season, you can collect your sample and bring it to the Health Department whenever you return. You do not need to notify the WROC or the Health Department that you are out of town. If you need to drop off your*

sample during a weekend when Town Hall is closed, please contact **Fred Schilpp** for special drop-off instructions at **(617) 599-0510**.

What if I don't want my water tested? Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, do not return your water sample.

Who will do the water testing? The water samples will be analyzed by the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment Laboratory.

How will results be reported? You will be notified of your sampling results in 3 – 4 weeks. Results will only be reported publicly on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. Individual results will not be reported publicly.

What if my test results are high? If your test results show a nitrate concentration of greater than 10 parts per million (ppm), you will be offered a retest to ensure that the results are correct. If results are still high, we will recommend that you consult with the Truro Health Agent about methods to reduce nitrates.

What areas will be tested in 2008 and 2009? The Water Resources Oversight Committee has not yet finalized the plans for 2008 and 2009. Results of this year's tests will be used to prioritize testing for next year. All property owners with private wells will be offered a free nitrate test by the summer of 2009.

What are nitrates? Nitrate (NO_3) is a compound of nitrogen and oxygen found in many food items in your everyday diet. Generally, the concentration in the ground water is low. The major adult human intake of nitrate is from food rather than from water. Vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, beets and carrots contain significant amounts of nitrate. Drinking water normally contributes only a small percentage of the total nitrate intake. Once taken into the body, nitrates are converted into nitrites.

Why test for nitrates? High levels of nitrate in the water indicates possible contamination from septic systems, livestock manure piles, or fertilizers. Nitrate analyses of water are very good indicators of the degradation of water quality due to septic system output.

What is the limit of nitrates in drinking water? The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set the Maximum Contaminant Level for nitrates at 10 parts per million (ppm).

Are nitrates harmful? Only at high levels for a protracted period of time. High nitrate levels have been associated with Methemoglobinemia (blue baby disease) in infants under the age of three months. It is possible that a person whose immune system is already weak due to HIV/AIDS, chemotherapy, steroid

use, or another reason, may suffer ill effects from nitrates, but there are many factors to be considered including the level of contamination and the length of exposure. The EPA recognizes that chronic effects may occur after people consume a contaminant at levels over their safety standards for many years.

Can nitrates be removed from my drinking water? *Yes. If contaminant levels are found to be consistently above 10 ppm, there are treatment methods that have been approved by the EPA for removing nitrates/nitrites: Ion exchange, Reverse Osmosis, Electrodialysis.*

Why not test all properties in Truro this year? *The 2007 plan was developed based on the WROC budget. We do not know of any areas of Truro that currently have a serious problem but believe it is prudent to develop a baseline for nitrate concentrations throughout Truro. Collecting this baseline information over a 3-year cycle is safe and reasonable.*

What if I want to know about more than nitrates in my water? *You can arrange for a comprehensive water test at your own expense at any time. Information and materials for private well testing can be obtained from the Health Department at Truro Town Hall.*

Who is paying for the testing? *The Water Resources Oversight Committee has a budget that is part of the budget for the Town of Truro.*

How can I help reduce nitrates in our groundwater? *First, use fertilizer sparingly or not at all. Do not apply more than recommended and wait until the ground has warmed to more than 50 degrees. Second, have your septic system pumped every three to five years. (Septic system effluent contains nitrates. A well-maintained septic system will not only prevent solids from the septic tank entering and clogging the leach field but will greatly lower the risk of groundwater contamination.) The WROC is developing an education plan to help property owners protect our water resources.*

What if I still have questions about the nitrate water quality monitoring program? *If you still have questions about the program, you can contact **Kevin Kuechler** (a WROC member) at **508-487-5770**.*

We encourage all households in Truro to participate in the WQPM as this will give us a sound baseline for evaluating water needs and policies in the future to ensure Truro has a safe and plentiful water supply for all. Thank You!