

Private Well Contamination in Plumstead Township Update: September 30, 2010

Status of pond water removal

Both ponds have been emptied by DEP's contractor, Tetra Tech. Pond water that had been stored in tanks on site has been removed. Soil sampling results from areas in and around the ponds revealed elevated levels of benzoic acid and antimony.

Weather permitting, during the week of October 4, Tetra Tech will begin to scrape approximately a foot of sediment from the ponds, cover and stockpile it at the site until it can be tested and properly disposed. Both ponds will be re-lined after all sediment is removed and confirmatory sampling has been performed.

In the event that water should accumulate in the ponds due to today's heavy rains, it will be monitored closely and pumped out to prevent spillage.

Sampling results for benzoic acid

In late August and early September, testing for semi-volatile organics was added to the sampling protocol for private wells in the vicinity of 5189 Stump Road as agencies were able to better understand the relationship between the food additive sodium benzoate, which had been stored on the Custom Particle Reduction property, and benzoic acid, which has been found in the ponds and some wells.

The presence of benzoic acid in lab results is suspected to be the result of sodium benzoate contamination in groundwater. There is no laboratory test for sodium benzoate.

DEP recently received results of sampling conducted on September 1st and 2nd. The samples were analyzed for semi-volatile organics (the test that can reveal benzoic acid). The results indicated that a resident on Ann Drive, whose well had not shown other impacts of post-fire contamination, had elevated levels of benzoic acid. Tanker water has been provided for that residence. Several other residences on Ann Drive were also sampled; the results revealed that the benzoic acid was not at levels of concern.

In total, test results for five private wells have revealed the presence of benzoic acid in levels of concern. Residents are currently receiving tanker water until a more permanent source of safe water can be provided.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health recommends that water from these residential wells be monitored to provide additional data that might document whether benzoic acid levels are decreasing.

During the week of October 4, approximately 30 homes will be retested for volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compounds (including benzoic acid) and metals.