Frequently asked Questions and Answers

Why is my water reddish or brown? This reddish-brown color is non-toxic, but it can stain laundry. Four possible causes are:

1. Flushing: The Water Department may be flushing water mains in the area. Water mains are flushed annually to remove rust and other substances. The Water Department announces the locations where mains are being flushed in in Town on the web page, newspaper and Rowley Community Media as well as placing signage around Town. To clear the water, allow the faucet to run for 1 to 2 minutes if using the water to drink or cook with. To avoid wasting water, catch the water in a pitcher or bucket and use it to water plants. Avoid doing laundry until the water is running clear. The Water Department offers a product called Red Be Gone. This product assists in removing staining caused by the iron in the water. Stop by the office at 401 Central St. to pick some up.

2. Firefighting: A fire in the neighborhood or maintenance on the water lines can cause reddish water. Contact The Rowley Water Department at 978-948-2640 x101 for information about such activity in your area.

3. The hot water heater is often a source of water quality problems. The storage tank in the water heater needs to be flushed out periodically. Some manufacturer's recommend doing this every 6 months. Refer to the owner's manual of your water heater for instructions.

4. Drinking water pipes in the street leading to a home, or within a home, may be rusting creating rusty-brown water. Some areas in Rowley's distribution system, such as those at dead-end lines or those served by unlined cast iron water mains, may be more susceptible to this type of problem. If the neighbors are not having this problem, it is likely household pipes or the water heater in the home experiencing the problem.

What can I do if my drinking water tastes funny? Contact the Rowley Water Department at 978-948-2640 x101 to report any sudden taste or odor change in the water or try one of the following:

1. Pour water from the cold water tap into a glass pitcher and store in the refrigerator. Although plastic containers can be used for storing water, some plastic can change the taste of water. Allowing the water sit overnight in the refrigerator should be sufficient to remove the taste of chlorine.

2. Boiling tap water for 5 minutes should remove most of the chlorine taste in water, as the water cools, it should be refrigerated. Chlorine is a disinfectant, and once it is removed, water must be treated like any other food product. Keep covered and use it within 3 days.

Tip: Add 1 or 2 teaspoons of lemon juice to refrigerated water for a more pleasant tasting drink.

Is it alright to use hot water from the tap for cooking/drinking? No, use cold water. Hot water is more likely to contain rust, copper, and lead from household plumbing and water heaters. These substances can dissolve into hot water faster than they do in cold water. This is especially true when water has not been used for a while. When water has not been used for an extended period of time, it is recommended to allow the faucet to run for 1 to 2 minutes if you are going to use the water to drink or cook with. To avoid wasting water, catch the water in a pitcher or bucket and use it to water plants.

Is water with chlorine in it safe to drink? Chlorine is the most common disinfectant used in the United States. Chlorine has been added to drinking water to kill disease causing organism since 1902. The amount of chlorine used is sufficient to kill bacteria, but is not enough to harm humans. Chlorination of public water is the best defense in reducing water-borne diseases. Chlorine is added to drinking water at the water filtration plant and at Well #2. The Water Department chlorinates the water to ensure there is 1.20mg/l when it leaves the filtration plant. It was found that chlorine could combine with naturally occurring, non-toxic, organic material in the water to form compounds that may cause cancer. These compounds are called disinfection by-products. The Water Department treats the water to minimize the formation of these disinfection by-products.

There are strict regulations about the amount of disinfection by-products allowed in water supplies. The Water Department monitors for these compounds in the distribution system. Check out the Annual water Quality report for more information.

What are the white flakes that float in my water? This white material may plug up aerators on faucets, screens, dishwashers and other water using appliances. The most likely source of this problem is the part of the hot water heater called a dip tube. The dip tube is located on the cold water inlet of the hot water heater and is made from polypropylene (plastic). This particular part, when defective, will disintegrate and form white flakes or chunks. This problem has occurred nationwide and affects many different brands of hot water heaters. To determine if your dip tube is the problem, you can perform this experiment:

- Take the aerator off your kitchen faucet and place a pan or container under the faucet or a stopper in the sink drain.
- Turn on the cold water and let it flow. You may see some initial flakes but it should clear up after a minute or two. Turn the cold water off. Empty the pan or drain the sink and make sure there are no flakes in it. Replace the pan or stopper under the faucet.
- Turn the tap water on hot on full flow and observe to see if the flakes continue to appear. If the problem is your hot water heater dip tube, you should see some more white flakes appear or increase in the hot water.
- When these flakes are dry, they can be flame heated slowly in a spoon. They should melt into a small shiny looking glob. Careful: don't let it catch on fire, it will smell like burning plastic. You can also place these flakes in vinegar. There should not be any reaction (foaming) and the particles will float in the vinegar. If after performing these experiments, you are not sure of your results, you can call the Water Department for more assistance.

Should I install a home water treatment system? You do not need to install a home filtration system. Most people do not need to treat their drinking water at home to make it safe. A home water treatment system is a matter of personal preference and can improve water's taste, or provide an extra margin of safety for people more vulnerable to the effects of waterborne illness (people with severely compromised immune systems and children may have special needs). Consumers who choose to purchase a home water treatment unit should carefully read its product information to understand what they are buying, whether it is a better taste or a certain method of treatment. Be certain to follow the manufacturer's instructions for operation and maintenance, especially changing the filter on a regular basis. No single unit takes out every kind of drinking water contaminant; you must decide which type best meets your needs.

Why does my water look milky? The most common cause of milky-looking or gray-colored water is dissolved air in the water. This condition is due to cold water that is already naturally saturated with dissolved gasses. This results in a sometimes milky-looking water at the tap, which is just air bubbles. Effervescence such as this is most noticeable in the winter and early spring months, though it can occur at any time of the year. Cold water from the ground enters your home and warms to room temperature, the dissolved gasses comes out of the water as tiny air bubbles.

To determine if tiny air bubbles are causing your water to look milky, you can do the following experiment:

1. Fill a clear glass with cold water and set it on a counter
2. Watch and see if the milky-looking substance rises to the top of the glass
3. Within a few minutes most of the tiny bubbles will move to the surface of the water and the water should look clear. If so, it was only air bubbles.

What should I do if I have my own drinking water well? If you have your own well, you are responsible for making sure that your water is safe to drink. A private well should be tested annually for nitrate and coliform bacteria to detect contamination problems early. Test more frequently and for other contaminants, such as radon or pesticides, if you suspect a problem. Check with your local health department and the water Department to learn more about well water quality in your area and what contaminants you are more likely to find. More information is available on EPA's page for private well owners. You can help protect your water supply by carefully managing activities near the water source.

Should I buy bottled water? Bottled water is not necessarily safer than your tap water. EPA sets standards for tap water provided by public water systems; the Food and Drug Administration sets bottled water standards based on EPA's tap water standards. Bottled water and tap water are both safe to drink if they meet these standards, Some bottled water is treated more than tap water, while some is treated less or not treated at all. Bottled water costs much more than tap water on a per gallon basis. Bottled water is valuable in emergency situations and high quality bottled water may be a desirable option for people with weakened immune systems. Consumers who choose to purchase bottled water should carefully read its label to understand what they are buying, whether it is a better taste, or a certain method of treatment.

References:

- EPA: http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/faq.cfm
- Plain Talk About Drinking Water (Third Edition), by permission. Copyright © 1997, American Water Works Association