

## Water clearer, but residents still wary

Written by Carol Pomeday

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### Neighbors prefer drinking bottled water until village system is looped to reduce sediment from tap

Three weeks ago, Nicole Callahan was so frustrated by the brown water that came from the faucet at her home at 261 First St. in Belgium that she filled a jar with it and took it to Village Hall the next day.

“I set it on the desk and the girls in the office just looked at it and asked what it was,” Callahan said. “I told them, ‘That was what came out of my tap last night. That’s what you tell me is safe to drink. Would you drink it?’”

“We always have discolored water on Thursday nights when the fire department practices, but this was the worst it had been in a long time.”

Callahan, the mother of three children ages 1 to 11, won’t let her family drink the water, but they do bathe in it — except on Thursday nights.

The family drinks bottled water.

Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said the line was flushed when he learned about the problem and to his knowledge the water has been clear since then. It is safe to drink, he said.

“We set up a schedule to flush it every two months through November, then we will re-evaluate it,” Birenbaum said.

Callahan said the water has been clear the last couple weeks, even on Thursday nights.

Her neighbor Wendy Lybek, 211 Spring St., said she doesn’t know if the water is clearer or not after fire practices.

“We don’t use the water on Thursdays,” Lybek said. “I don’t want to have to let it run for one to two hours and pay the water bill. Our water is expensive and it just went up again. It seems whoever uses the water first gets the brownest water.”

Lybek, who has two daughters, ages 10 and 8, said she stopped complaining to the village because it didn’t seem to do much good.

“I was told I had to fill out a complaint form, but no one ever contacted me,” she said.

Lybek is battling cancer and said she did not want to use the water while her immune system was diminished by treatments.

The problem occurs in an approximately one-block area that includes portions of Spring, First and Lar Ann streets where the water line ends rather than looping with other lines. Water sits in

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the pipe, causing sediment to collect. The sediment is dislodged when a lot of water flows through the pipe, Birenbaum said.

That happens Thursday nights when the fire department uses large amounts of water during practices.

At the time the water line was approved, commercial and residential development was planned to the south and the line was to extend into that area, Birenbaum said. Only a grocery store was built and that closed after one year.

Randy Mickelson, 247 First St., has contacted the village numerous time about the water situation. In 2008, he submitted a petition with 30 signatures asking the village to do something to make the water safe.

“It hasn’t gotten much better,” he said Tuesday. “We haven’t gotten a heavy blast where it’s amber like before, but it’s still leaving a brown film in the water bowl.”

He recently sent a letter requesting the village flush the line once a month until a permanent solution is found.

“They sent a letter saying they wanted access to my home,” Mickelson. “Why do they need to come inside? The water coming out of the outdoor tap is the same as the water inside. I will give them a water sample from inside if they want it, but I won’t let them in the house.”

Birenbaum said samples taken at neighbors’ homes since the line was flushed last month have been clear. Different chemicals were added in 2008 to the water filtration plant that corrected some of the problem, he said.

Village President Kevin Kowalkowski said Monday areas where water lines dead-end are scheduled to be looped into the system in 2013.

“It will cost \$300,000 to do all the work,” he said. “Our engineer said doing just that area may not solve the problem and it will cost a lot of money. It will be less expensive to do it all at once.

“I have a hard time right now, given the economy, spending that kind of money, and a month later we may have the same problem. I made the decision to do the flushing for now and schedule the work for 2013.”