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EPA's Test Results Show Safe Drinking Water in Dimock

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BY SUSAN PHILLIPS



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Dimock resident Victoria Switzer inside her home. EPA gave her the greenlight to drink her water, but she says she'll never trust her well water again.

The Environmental Protection Agency says the drinking water test results of 11 homes in Dimock, Pa. did not show contamination high enough to pose a health threat. Two of the homes tested did show arsenic, but the EPA says the arsenic levels are within safe drinking water standards. They plan to retest the water from those households. The water supplies of six of 11 homes did show sodium, methane, chromium or bacteria. Again, the EPA says the concentrations were within the safe range for drinking water.

The EPA says it will continue to provide water to three homes while doing additional sampling. The agency says it will re-evaluate sending water to those households after conducting its second round of testing. In the meantime, the EPA says they will meet with residents to discuss their health-related concerns.

The EPA stepped in to Dimock's water controversy after state regulators said Cabot Oil and Gas could halt free water deliveries to residents. The head of Pennsylvania's DEP, Michael Krancer, criticized the federal action. In a statement issued by the EPA on Thursday, the agency says it continues to base its decisions on science.

"Our actions will continue to be based on the science and the law as we work to help get a clear picture of water quality for these homes in Dimock."

Dimock resident Victoria Switzer says EPA officials showed up at her door on Wednesday to hand deliver the results. The tests by the EPA show sodium in Switzer's water but says it poses no health concerns. There are no federal drinking water standards for either sodium or methane. But EPA spokesman Roy Seneca says they did find methane and sodium above "trigger" levels in some households.

"This prompted us to do an earlier review by a toxicologist and to expedite a quality assurance review should we need to take an immediate action to provide water," wrote Seneca in an email response. "EPA conducted those reviews and found no health concerns."

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Still, Switzer says she has mixed feelings about the results.



"I'd like to say it gives me a sense of relief because I can shower and do laundry," said Switzer. "But I'm not going to drink my water."

Switzer hasn't drank her water for four years, when she says it came out of her tap gray and foamy. The water is now clear, and she installed a vent to reduce the amount of methane in her well water, which she uses for bathing. But she says her water test results over those four years have fluctuated between drinkable and non-drinkable. So Switzer says she'll never know when the water could change for the worse.

"I will never feel secure enough to drink that water," she said.

Her neighbor Craig Sautner, agrees. "I would never ever, ever, drink that water again," said Sautner. Sautner and Switzer are two of several residents suing Cabot Oil and Gas over the contamination.

But Anne Teel, a neighbor of Switzer and Sautner, says she feels perfectly safe drinking her water. Teel's water well was plugged up with sediment after gas drilling occurred nearby. But Teel says her water tests now show it's clean. Cabot Oil and Gas provided Teel with fresh water, but she says she and her husband have been using the well water for the past two years.



"I don't know how many more times you can test the water," said Teel. "And we've never had anything that's shown we shouldn't continue to drink the water."

Teel and her husband Ron leased their land to Cabot, which drilled its first test wells on their property. The Teels also had the EPA test their water recently, but it's unclear if they have received results yet. The EPA tested about 60 households, but not all of the water tests have been completed. EPA spokesman Ron Seneca says the agency plans to release sets of tests each week for the next three weeks.

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Dimock residents Anne and Ron Teel say they feel safe drinking their water.

Cabot Oil and Gas released a statement saying the company is "steadfastly committed to environmental stewardship" and is happy with the EPA's first 11 test results.

"We are pleased that data released by EPA today on sampling of water in Dimock confirmed earlier findings that Dimock drinking water meets all regulatory standards."

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