

## MARK STEPHENSON: Salt on roadway pollutes water supply

0 tweet

Posted: Friday, February 11, 2011 3:00 am | Updated: 12:05 am, Sun Feb 13, 2011.

Thank you, Robert G. Smith, for your letter concerning salt used on roadways and the threat to our water, which appeared in the Gazette on Feb. 1.

In March 2010 a spring that serves as a water supply to a residence I own acquired a foul, salty taste and discoloration.

I hired a laboratory, certified by the Department of Environmental Protection, to test the water. Subsequently I contacted DEP requesting an investigation of the cause of the water degradation. DEP sampled the water. In addition I possessed the results of a sample of the water supply taken a couple of years earlier by a private laboratory certified by DEP.

To make a long story short, the March 2010 water test revealed several constituents were increased over the earlier results by the following amounts: chloride, 860 percent; calcium, 350 percent; sodium, 2113 percent; magnesium, 153 percent; manganese, 340 percent; potassium, 197 percent; sulfates, 153 percent; and barium, 135 percent. The DEP investigation revealed similar findings.

Here's the rub. DEP's response: "Was a gas well recently drilled in the area?" Answer: No. "Any gas wells with leaking brine tanks in the area?" Answer: No.

A DEP representative then told me that if I could find a gas well to "pin it on," the DEP could do something about it; otherwise the DEP does not consider a spring to be a water supply and DEP only considers water deeper than 40 feet in the ground as "waters of the commonwealth" or a well to that depth as a water supply having protection under the law, unless a gas well caused the pollution.

After repeated correspondence with the DEP representative, I was told that the spring was most likely polluted by salt spread by PennDOT on a nearby roadway, and DEP wouldn't do anything about it as it was another state agency causing the problem, and DEP didn't consider the polluted water as "waters of the commonwealth."

I was reminded again that if a gas well caused it, DEP could do something about it. I felt like I was being coached to conjure up something.

Incidentally, these same constituents that were highly elevated in my water supply are similar to those occasionally experienced from gas well drilling operations. This begs the question of whether DEP is playing a game of "pin the tail on the gas well" when it makes claims that elevated salts polluting the waters of the commonwealth must be from gas well drilling operations.

The final rub to this story: I never told the DEP representative that I am president of an oil and gas exploration company, and I suspect he was not aware of it either. Once again this is a fine example of your tax dollars or the fee-payers' dollars at work; and science versus politics, politics wins.

**Mark A. Stephenson**

**Smicksburg**

**More about Indiana**

- **ARTICLE:** Decision on Horace Mann awaits roof study
- **ARTICLE:** Court puts trooper's lawsuit on hold
- **ARTICLE:** KCAC expands concert lineup

- **ARTICLE:** DEAR ABBY: Aunt fears sexually active niece is headed for trouble
- **ARTICLE:** CAL THOMAS: Egypt's dim future

**More about Pa.**

- **ARTICLE:** DEAR ABBY: Aunt fears sexually active niece is headed for trouble
- **ARTICLE:** CAL THOMAS: Egypt's dim future
- **ARTICLE:** HS BASKETBALL: Homer-Center boys edge United in play off tuneup
- **ARTICLE:** HS BASKETBALL: Indiana girls receive No. 1 play off seed
- **ARTICLE:** WEEKLY ONLINE POLL RESULT: Readers try to stay fit in winter