

H2O horror

Incorrect softener hook-ups can lead to contaminated water

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

A Georgetown man has recently replaced the nearly-new water softener in his home for fear it may have been contaminated with sewer water or sewer gas.

Danny Martin, a plumber, spotted immediately that the water softener in the home he was going to purchase in Georgetown had been installed incorrectly, but rather than say anything at the time he decided to wait until the deal went through so he could ensure his water softener was installed properly by doing it himself.

The softener's drain in the three-year-old home in Georgetown South had been directly connected to the sewage stack in the basement.

"It's a direct connection to a potentially non-potable substance," said Aneta Ludwig, Cross Connection Back Flow Prevention Coordinator with Halton Region.

During the cycling process there is suction in the unit's drain

that could literally suck back sewer gases and maybe even sewer water into the drinking water system through the water softener.

"The potential is there," said Martin, who purchased and installed a new water softener.

"I don't care how long I could flush it. I have two small daughters. I'm not taking any chances," said Martin.

Martin believes 90 per cent of all water softeners are installed incorrectly.

Ludwig can't say how prevalent the problem is because Halton Region doesn't have jurisdiction over connections in private residences.

The Region's 2006 Cross Connection bylaw applies to industrial, institutional, commercial and multi-residential uses. It doesn't include residential, but Ludwig says it doesn't exclude it.

This is the first incident like the one at Martin's home that she has firsthand knowledge of, but she says her colleagues in other municipalities that do have jurisdiction over private property, agree

with Martin that "about 90 per cent (of water softeners) are installed improperly."

Ludwig said there has to be a minimum of a one-and-a-half inch air gap, or twice the diameter of the drain pipe, between the drain from the water softener and the top of wherever it is draining into, for example a floor drain or laundry tub.

She recommends that homeowners with softeners check to make sure they have been installed properly, and if not, contact the company that installed it to have the problem rectified.

Homeowners can also check out the Halton Region website at www.halton.ca/ppw/water/BackflowPrevention/CCCP_Background.htm for a list of recommended licensed testers to come in and check their softener is installed correctly.

"How huge a problem that it is on a health scale, I can't answer," said Ludwig. She suggests for further information on water softener installation visit www.barrie.ca and search backflow prevention.



Danny Martin of Georgetown feared the water softener in the home he recently purchased had been contaminated by sewer water or sewer gas because it was incorrectly installed. Martin, pictured above with Aneta Ludwig, Halton Region's Cross Connection Back Flow Prevention Coordinator, has replaced the softener. At right, the water softener's drain was improperly directly connected to the sewage stack in the basement.

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