

Roadside spray: is it dangerous or 'safe as mouthwash?'

By JANET BAINE

Signs are springing up like weeds along Halton Hills rural roads, asking the Town not to spray 2-4-D, a chemical herbicide along roadside property.

In a bid to rid rural roads of noxious weeds, 2-4-D is sprayed once a year by the Town, but there is a growing concern by residents of the potential harmful effects on humans and the environment.

"I think it's right for people to be concerned about what's going on around them," said Keith Solomon, director of the Canadian Centre for Toxicology. But he noted there is little evidence of long-term health or environmental effects — people's concerns about 2-4-D are "fear of the unknown more than anything else."

The chemical breaks down in four to five days, so it's unlikely to

get into drinking water or to be absorbed by the roots of plants to be consumed by people, Solomon said.

"My opinion, and I'm not a licensed (chemical) sprayer, is that 2-4-D is probably as safe or safer than mouthwash that you use daily," said Frank Morette, Halton Hills Superintendent of Public Works, the man in charge of the \$14,500 program.

However, "nobody can be absolutely sure," about the potential effects of the chemical, Solomon admitted. "We could find out something new about it tomorrow."

And that's why some residents have decided to take no chances.

"We just felt we didn't need the chemicals around there," said Bill Karn, who has posted a no spray sign in front of his Limehouse property. "Our well is in the front part (of the property), so there is that possibility of (the chemicals) leaking into the well."

Another resident, Glen Scott put a No Spray sign up, but thinks health and environment concerns are "a bit overdone."

"We just have the sign up for one reason. The spray might kill foliage on the flowers in a garden that's close to the road," he explained.

Halton Hills gives its residents an option of having their rural property sprayed. Usually the

Town sprays in the spring, but this year the program was late in starting and was completed only last week.

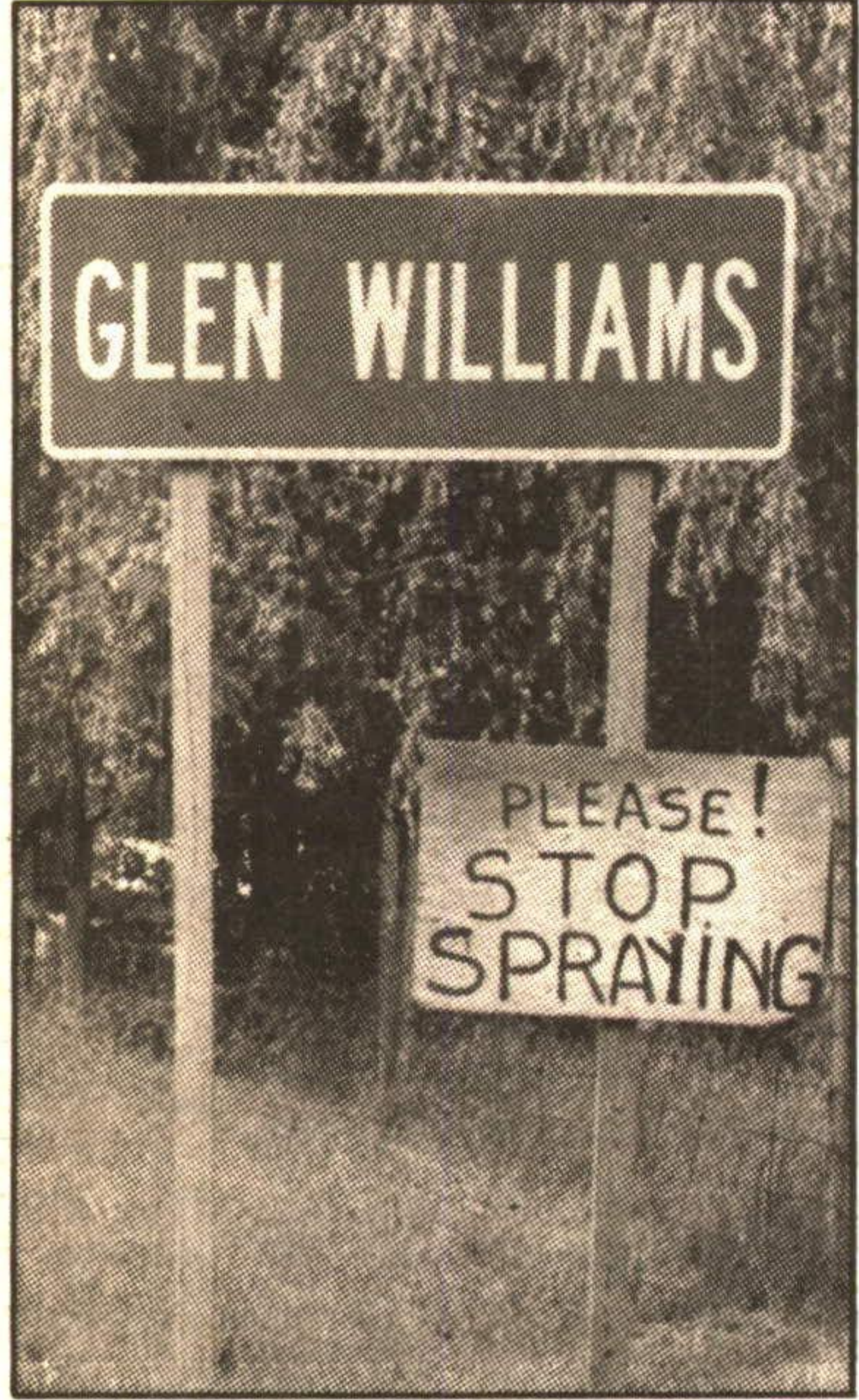
Residents are informed by advertisements and letters before spraying is done, a requirement of the new Pesticide Act which came in effect June 3, said Morette who admits spraying "is a very, very ticklish thing." He added that less people put up signs this year than he expected but the final tally wasn't in yet.

Spraying kills noxious weeds — and since it's selective and kills only broadleaf plants including ragweed and goldenrod which cause allergies, hay fever sufferers will

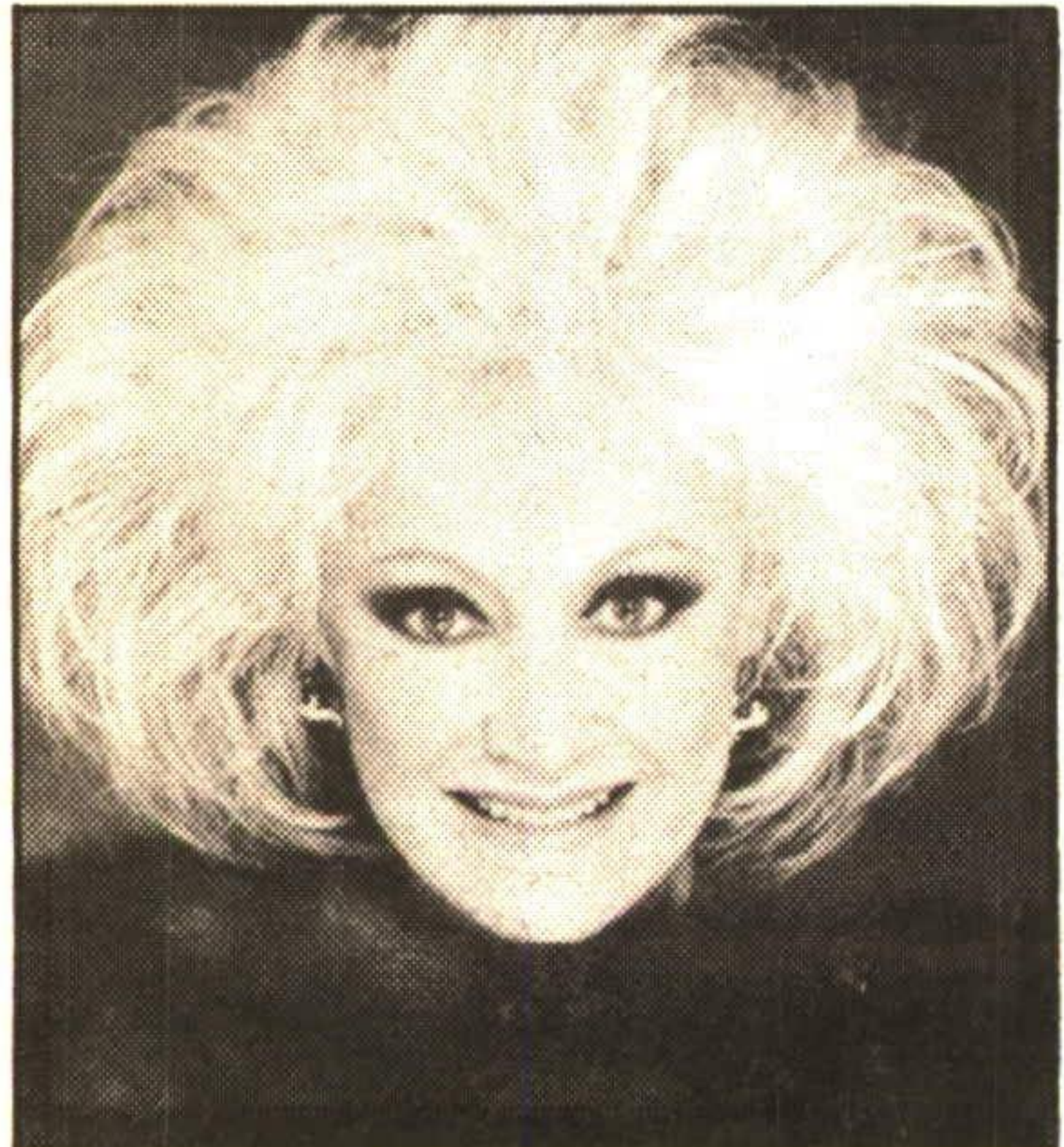
sneeze less, Morette said. The herbicide also kills young trees and shrubs which attract small animals to the roadside like rabbits and raccoons. Without plants to feed on, animals are less likely to wander out into the road and be hit, or cause an accident.

"Let's put it this way," says Toxicology Director Solomon, "It probably saves lives and doesn't put anyone at risk."

Solomon says 2-4-D's reputation is tainted because it's used to make Agent Orange, a cancer-causing defoliant used during the Vietnam War. It's also related to 2-4-5-T, a chemical spray taken off the market because it contained PCBs.



More Halton Hills residents have begun posting signs to stop herbicide spraying on roadside property, fearing environmental damage.



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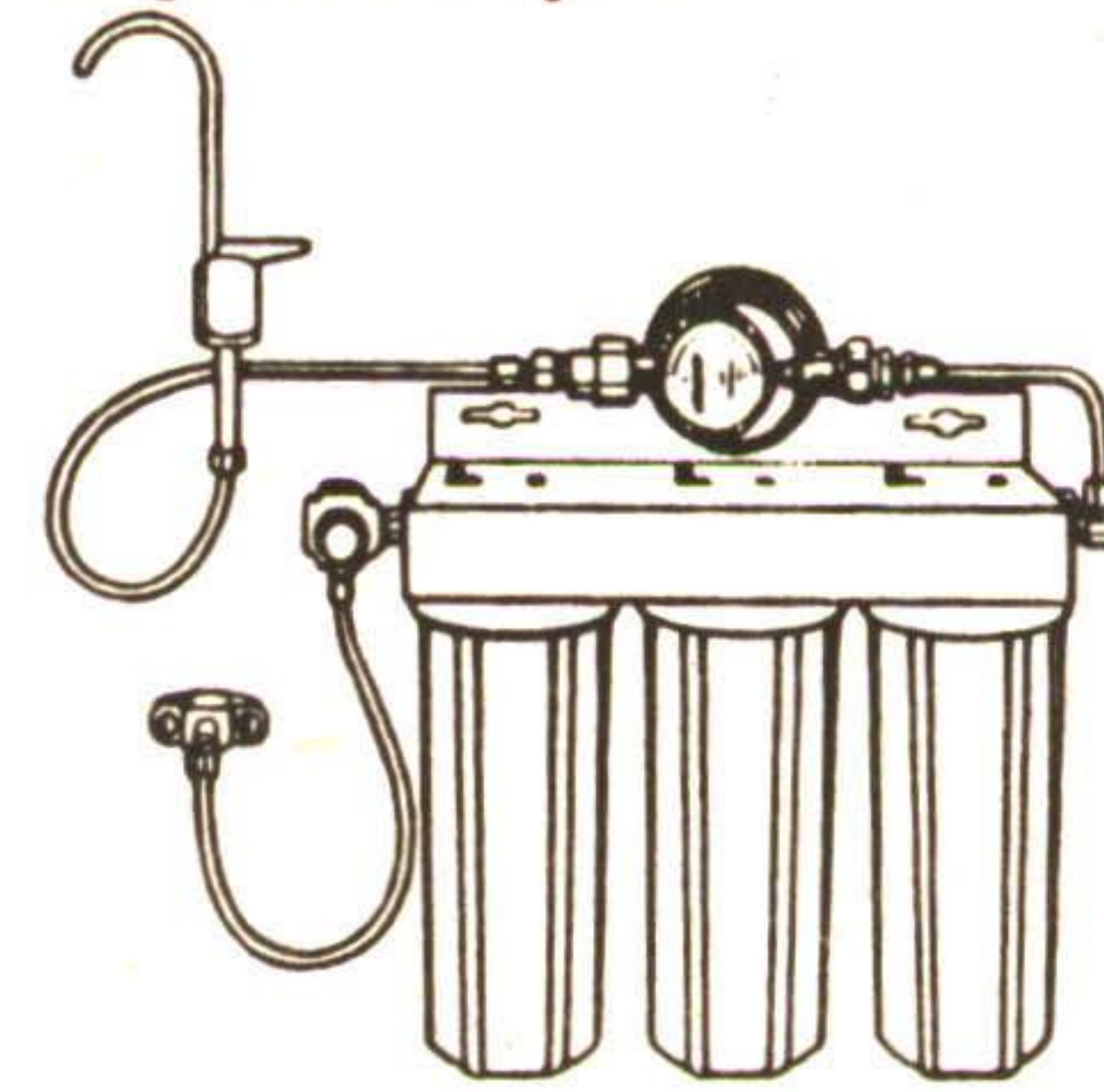
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