

DRINKING FOUNTAINS SHUT OFF

# School water tested

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

Three York Region schools shut off drinking fountains and brought in bottled water as a precaution against possible contaminated drinking water this week.

All three schools — St. Joseph Catholic School in Aurora, St. Catholic Elementary School in Schomberg and Park Avenue Public School in Holland Landing — received a clean bill of health by the end of week.

A battery of initial tests found isolated but potentially harmful bacteria in the schools. But subsequent tests found the drinking water was potable.

The separate board, which had tested all its schools over the previous two weeks, sent letters home Monday after coliform bacteria was found in a sink in an unused boy's changeroom at St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School in Aurora.

It was strictly a precautionary measure, board spokesperson Chris Cable said.

"It's a very localized situation to that one faucet," she stressed, adding the school got a clean bill of health after it flushed the pipes and chlorinated all fixtures in the school.

A similar localized result, followed by the same precautions, was seen after a custodian's sink was tested at St. Patrick Catholic Elementary in Schomberg.

A municipal water test done by East Gwillimbury also spotted another problem area yesterday at Park Avenue Public School in Holland Landing.

But by Friday evening parents were told drinking water in the school was "absolutely fine," and children would be allowed to drink from fountains Monday morning.

Both boards had decided tests by independent firms were necessary in all their schools after Legionella, a bacteria that can cause pneumonia and Legionnaires' disease, was found inside a North York school late last month.

"We had parents asking, so we tested," said public board spokesperson Brian Jamieson, who noted Thursday that all test results in the region's public schools were "clear in every case," meaning no potential problems were found.

That was just before East Gwillimbury made its results for Park Avenue known, however.

But yesterday Jamieson said the municipal test was "not as scientific" as the one the board conducted.

The board's consultant's test was negative for coliform, fecal matter and E. coli.

# RURAL WATER NIGHTMARE

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

Hundreds of rural residents in York Region have been told their groundwater supply might be unsafe to drink.

This week, tests found harmful bacteria or nitrates in 64 of 127 wells in the Markham hamlet of Box Grove, with 27 results still unknown at press time.

High bacteria levels also were recently found in 20 wells within a second small community, Lloydtown near Schomberg in King Township.

And on Monday, the region's health department was told that 146 tests — over a quarter of those submitted from homeowners across the region to a provincial health ministry lab between June 1 and 5 — also contained dangerous amounts of bacteria.

A construction firm preparing to lay a sewer line through Box Grove performed the tests and contacted authorities with the first results Wednesday.

Health inspectors went door to door through the hamlet to deliver information on how to disinfect wells and urge additional tests. "We didn't know if (the samples taken) were from the drinking water or not," Oryst Zyhar, a health department official, added Thursday.

Residents whose tests showed bacterial growth were urged to boil their water for five minutes. Those with nitrates were advised to get a new water supply. Box Grove is just south of the Hwy. 407 extension to Pickering, currently under construction in Markham's east end.

Local people who know the water think it's because of construction disturbances that contaminants have entered the water table, said Tom Farrar, president of the ratepayers association.

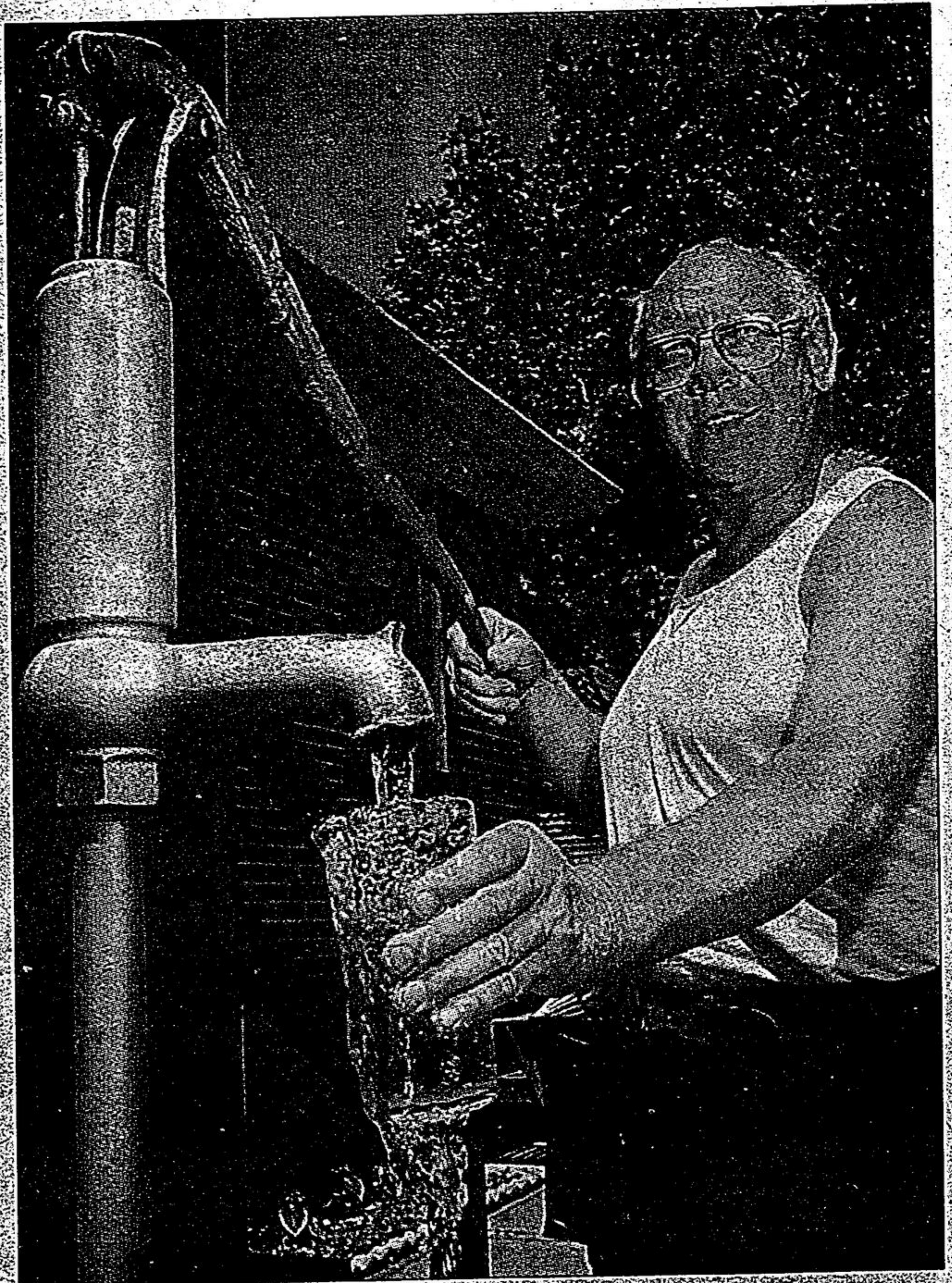
Ninth Line resident Bob Watt said he paid to hook up to the municipal supply because he knew building the highway would affect his wells. "They thought I was nuts, putting town water in when I had two wells running," he said.

A week earlier, results from tests Watt ordered confirmed he had a problem: both his wells, including a drilled one 86 feet deep which never had bacteria before, had to be decontaminated.

In May, a staff memo assured Markham Mayor Don Cousens and Markham councillors that town residents could contact the highway's private owners if they have any problems with their wells.

"All well quantity or quality concerns will be investigated and those deemed to be a result of the 407 construction will be dealt with," by providing a temporary water supply, a municipal connection, a well upgrade or a new well, said the memo from engineering director Alan Brown.

Told about the test results, however, Betty Fevreau, a spokesperson for the consortium, denied the company has done anything to affect the wells. "That has nothing to do with us," she said.

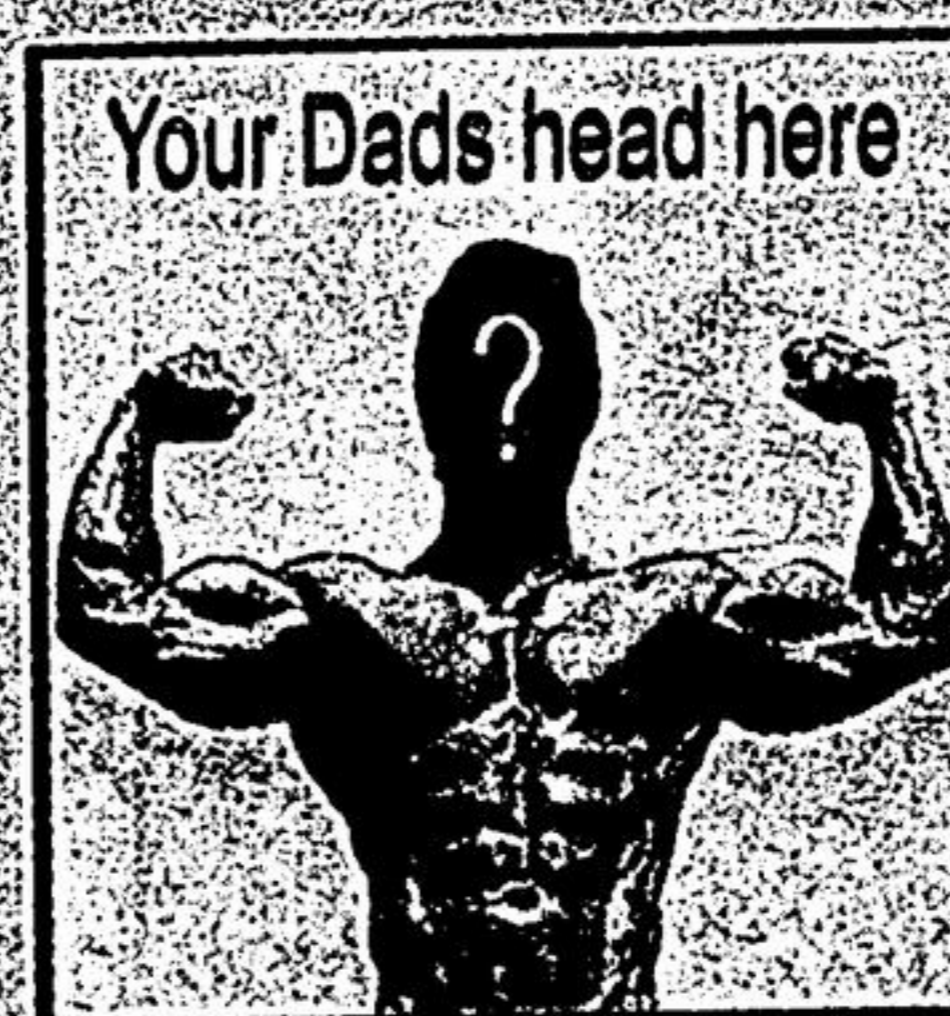
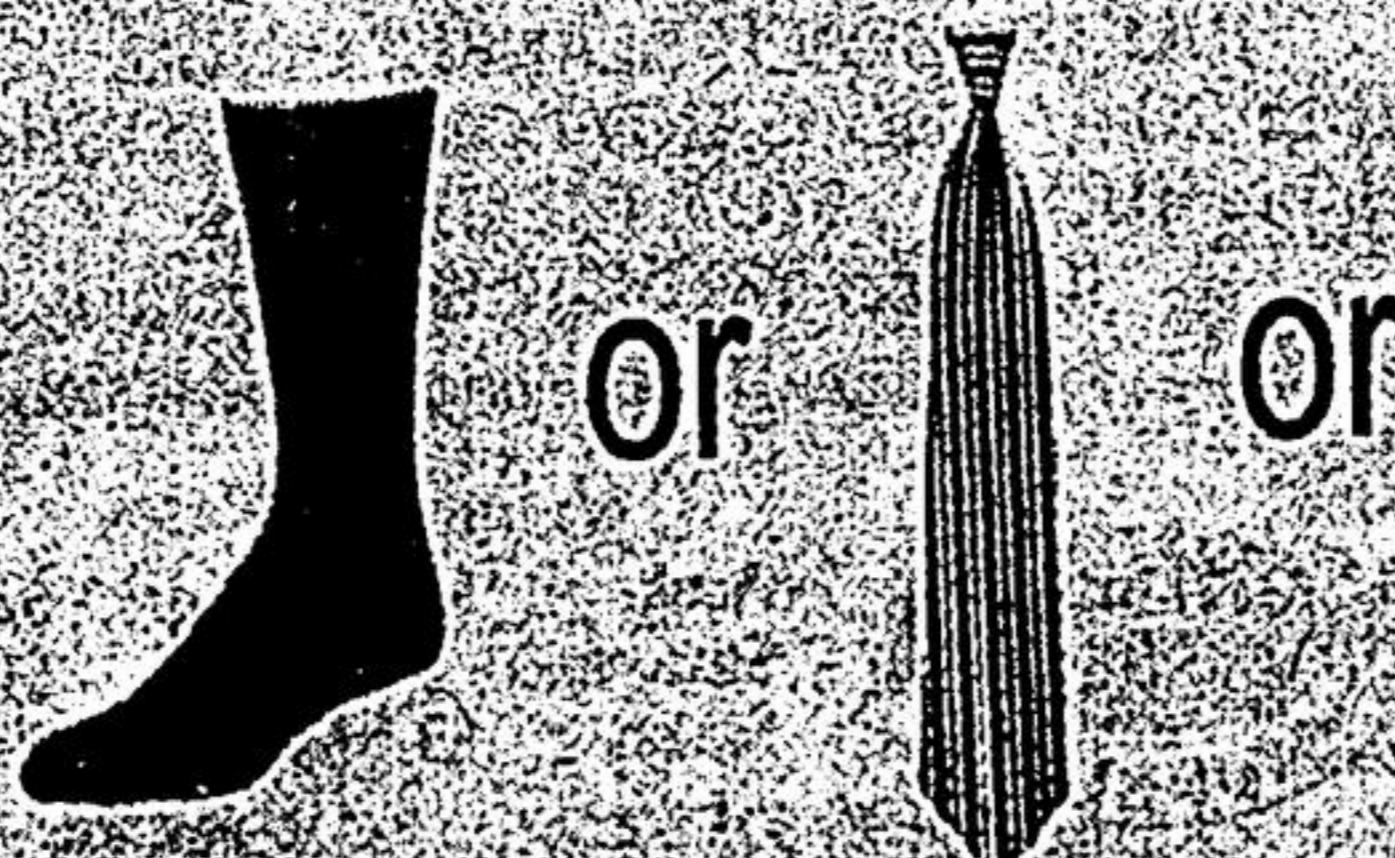


Above, Bob Watt of Box Grove dug this 20-foot well two decades ago. He has since dug an 85-foot well, which, when tested, showed unacceptable levels of bacteria. At left, Judy Monahan, who lives on 14th Avenue, discovered she now has to boil her drinking water for five minutes.

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