

Don't Drink The Water! How To Be On Alert For Water Purifier Scams

For millions of Americans, warming weather and longer days mean more than just baseball and allergies. It's a great time to be rolling up your sleeves, opening up the toolbox and getting started on home improvement projects. With recent crises like the water quality in Flint, Michigan, prominent in headlines across America, many consumers are beginning to pay more attention to their own local water quality.

There are many legitimate ways to improve your home's value by improving its plumbing. You could add an in-line purifier, a water softener or a tankless water heater. However, not all plumbing improvements are created equal, and many people don't think about what comes out of the tap unless it's brown or has a foul odor.

Imagine, then, two men coming to your door wearing navy blue jumpsuits. They say they're from the water company and they need to do some tests on your tap water for public safety. They pour a small quantity in a beaker and claim to be testing for lead, mercury or some other contaminant. They tell you that, if the substance they add turns red, your water is dangerous and potentially toxic. They add a few drops and swirl it around. Lo and behold, your tap water turns a menacing blood red!

These gentlemen are quick to reassure you that this is not an unsolvable problem. It'll take them a few days to get the parts together, but they can install a system to treat your water for just a few hundred dollars. If you write them a check now, they can get to work right away and have you and your family safe in minutes!

Of course, there is no real danger... in your water. These men don't work for the water company and the substance they added to your water was food coloring. They might install a \$20 water purifier, which is available at any hardware store, to your kitchen sink, and walk away with hundreds of your dollars. You've just been the victim of a water purifier scam.

Now that you know how it works, you can take steps to help keep yourself from being a victim. Like most other scams, the advice is pretty straightforward. Ask for identification, do your own research and be proactive.

Who are you, again?

If your life goes according to plan and you never encounter a major plumbing disaster, you may never see an employee of the water company. Your only interaction with them will be a monthly bill. On that bill, though, is a number you can call to connect with a service manager. A quick phone call to verify the identities of the "workers" who offer to help you out should scare away most scammers.

Don't be afraid to ask anyone who comes to your door for proper identification and don't be shy about verifying that information. Anyone who represents a legitimate organization will want you to know they represent someone you trust. That will bolster their credibility and make the rest of their job easier. It's only people who are trying to deceive you who want to short circuit your research.

Water companies, like any other employer, try to keep their employment costs low. If they had so little work to do that they could send people door-to-door to test water for free, you'd be paying much more on your monthly bill than you do currently.

Also, be careful of people who claim to be "certified" by a government agency, like the EPA. The EPA doesn't endorse any specific brand of water purifier, nor would it. There are many different water filter suppliers across the country, and no single one would be appropriate for all situations. If a product bears an EPA seal, that means the company has registered its product with the EPA and nothing more.

Test your water yourself

If you have concerns about the quality of your drinking water, there are a number of services available for putting your mind at ease. For starters, your water company is required to provide analysis and test results to members of the public. Call your water company and ask for the latest test results of the water supply if they have not already provided it to you. Take that information and compare it to EPA standards for clean drinking water.

If you have a well, many state and local environmental agencies will conduct testing for bacteria and other common contaminants for free or for a reduced price. Maintaining clean drinking water for all citizens is a public health concern, and many agencies are willing to cooperate to ensure your water passes that standard.

If you have concerns about the water supply in your house, you can order a chemical analysis of your house's tap water. There are kits for sale in many hardware stores that will test for acidity, runoff contamination and bacteria. These are the most common problems facing home plumbing systems. Many labs also offer independent chemical analysis, though these may run hundreds of dollars, depending upon the level of detail required.

Fix it!

There are many solutions available for DIY water purification. These can be as simple as a water filter pitcher, which removes many common impurities and can help with taste and odor. If you're looking for something on a larger scale, many companies sell whole-house water filtration systems, though these can also cost hundreds of dollars.

As people become more health conscious, drinking water may become a serious issue for home-buyers. Purifiers and softeners can also help to extend the life of your plumbing and fixtures by eliminating mineral deposits before they have a chance to corrode your house plumbing. These improvements may also be worthwhile in terms of the value they add to your house.

Access to clean, safe drinking water is an important part of everyone's well-being. Don't let scammers play on your fear and destroy your peace of mind. Whether you're looking for help finding a reputable contractor or are undertaking a serious renovation on your own, stopping by MembersAlliance Credit Union can be a great first step.

SOURCES:

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