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The Mercury

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DRUNK DRIVING LOG: None today

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Safeguarding the water, Chester County a leader

By **BOB MONTGOMERY**
Mercury Staff Writer

POTTSTOWN — Chester County is considered by environmental officials to be one of the leaders in protecting its citizens from bad water.

While many parts of the state are trying to bring their water standards up to the 1980s, the Chester County Health Department has been consistently in step with the times, according to Jerry Centofanti, supervising sanitarian with the state Department of Environmental Resources for Montgomery and Delaware counties.

Centofanti said Chester County not only has tougher regulations than many of DER's own standards, but it acts as its own enforcer. Plus, the county freely offers help and information to private and public water suppliers, unlike most county governments that defer the subject of water to DER.

Some of Chester County's regulations on private wells and public suppliers are so tough, in fact, that many in neighboring Montgomery and Berks counties would not be able to comply, according to a water laboratory official.

Rick Stump, laboratory director at Suburban Water Testing Labs, Frederick, said every county ought to follow Chester County's example.

"Chester County is on top of water," said Stump. "They have a sanitarian for each township and require a water test for primary and secondary contaminants on

(Continued on page 5)

What are you drinking?



EDITOR'S NOTE — Mercury reporter Bob Montgomery has spent three months in an extensive sampling of the municipal water systems in the Greater Pottstown Area.

While The Mercury survey found several locales with specific problems — TCE, a carcinogen, in high levels in Collegetown and Trappe; elements of gasoline in Exeter — the general finding was that municipal water systems in our area are providing their customers with safe, if not pure, drinking water.

Where you can get your water tested

By **BOB MONTGOMERY**
Mercury Staff Writer

POTTSTOWN — If you aren't quite sure about your water quality, and you think you may have bacteria or chemical contamination, you'll probably want to have your water tested.

There are a few laboratories locally which will test your water. The majority of their business, however, comes from large businesses and industries which are under heavier government regulations to have waste water and industrial discharges tested.

The Mercury contracted Suburban Water Testing Labs, Frederick, to test samples from 28 locations gathered during a three-month investigation.

Suburban has done testing for such magazines as "Reader's Digest" and "Prevention" and for the television show "Good Morning America."

Other area laboratories contacted by The Mercury for information include RMC Laboratories, Fricks Locks Road, East Coventry Township; and Wastex Industries, 28 S. Hanover St., Pottstown.

Bacteria testing is the most common test done by laboratories. Homeowners with private wells are urged to test for coliform bacteria twice annually. Those with municipal water need not get bacteria tests done unless they suspect bacteria contamination.

The cost generally ranges from \$6 to \$20 a sample, depending on the laboratory and the procedure. If you pick up the bottle from the lab, take it home, get the sample, and return it to the lab yourself, it will save you money. The cost would be closer to \$6 to \$10.

Also if you have a private well and you live near a farm field that utilizes fertilizers — or you live near a landfill or an industry that utilizes chemicals — you

may want to get an industrial solvents scan of your water.

This is more expensive, with costs ranging from \$50 to \$125 for a basic scan of chemicals most commonly found in drinking water supplies. For the money, you will get a report of what was found, and in some cases, the amount found. Generally, the lab personnel will tell you if you have too much of a chemical and if further testing is required.

If you want even more extensive testing for chemicals, you can run up a bill into the thousands of dollars.

Here is a look at Suburban, RMC, and Wastex:

Suburban: Facilities located in Temple, Berks County, and in Frederick, Montgomery County. Founded in 1963 by Donald G. Saltman, who currently serves as corporate president. Lab is certified in six categories by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Resources. Lab specializes in analyzing drinking water; not waste or industrial discharges.

The Frederick laboratory was destroyed by fire in June 1985, but was rebuilt and is back in operation. The firm's partner company, Suburban Water Technologies Inc., offers a complete line of correction equipment designed to solve problems that cannot be corrected at the source.

Richard Stump, 33, of Laureldale, is laboratory director and vice president of the labs. Marie McCarter is secretary-treasurer. Suburban also has a toll-free number for information and consultation on water problems. The number is 1-800-525-6464.

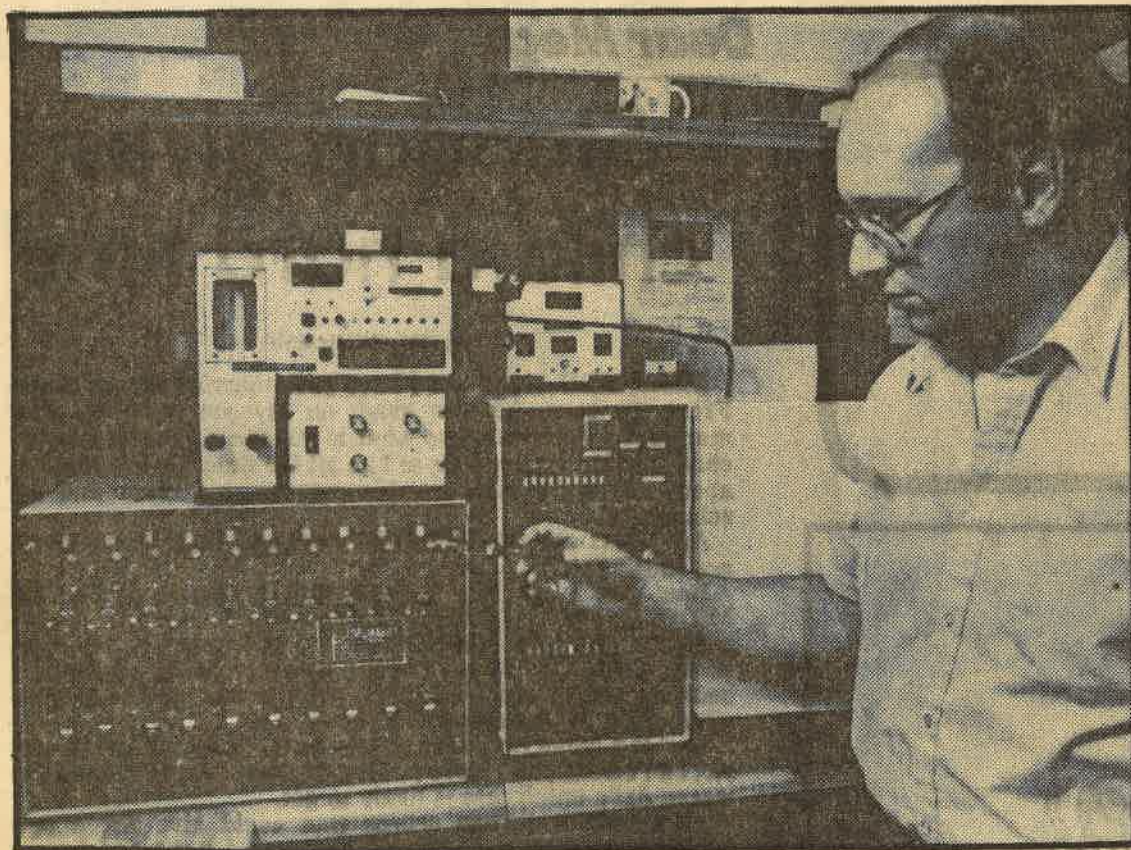
RMC Laboratories: Facilities located on Fricks Locks Road, East Coventry Township. Founded in 1967. RMC has two departments — a chemistry department which handles analytical work; and a

biology department made up of biologists who conduct stream surveys, fish surveys, etc.

Kyle Gross is laboratory supervisor. He urges regular bacteriological testing, and then chemical testing if feasible. Homeowners who live near landfills are particularly urged to get their water tested, according to Gross. Laboratory is certified.

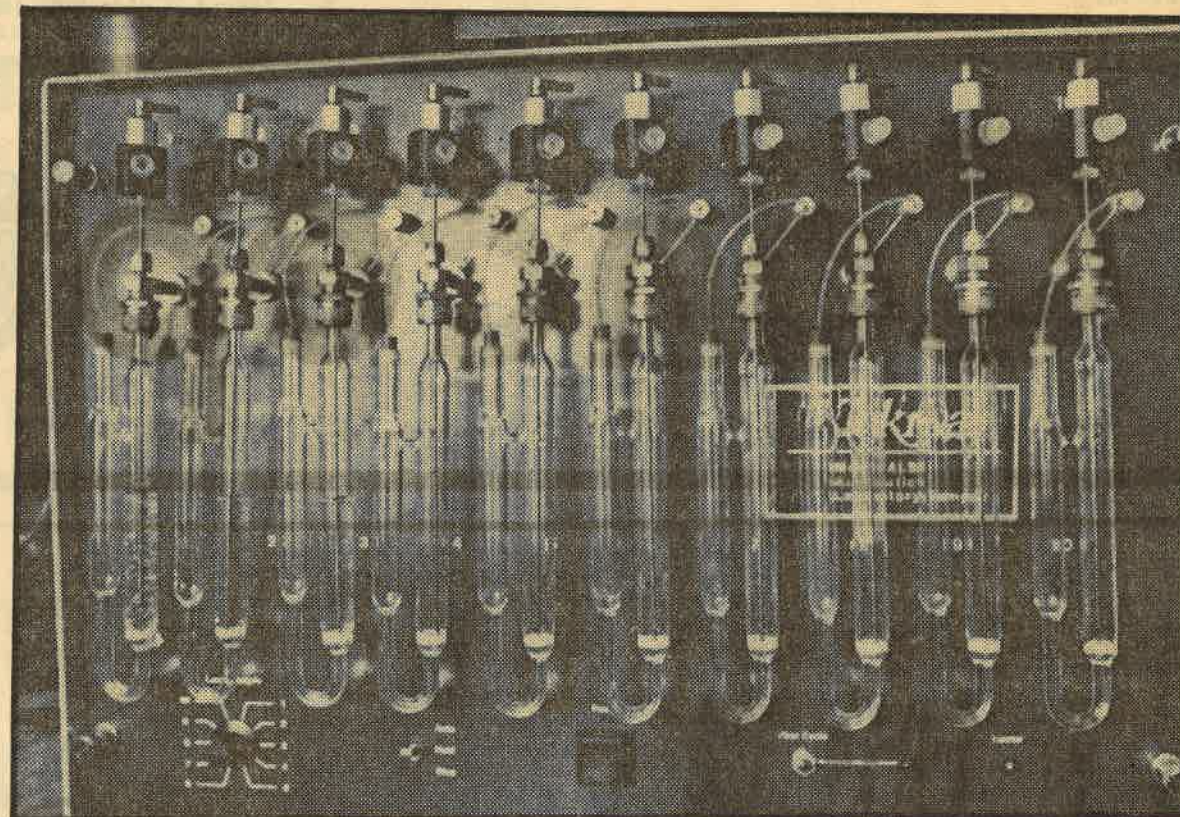
Wastex: Local office at 28 S. Hanover St., Pottstown. Main offices at Elmwood Park, N.J. Founded in 1957. Laboratory is certified. Testing done for homeowners with private wells, businesses, industries, and municipalities. Firm noted for its environmental technology.

Donald Jones is president. Lab personnel also offer advice on how to handle water problems. Homeowners with private wells should have their water checked at least once a year, according to Jones, because "contaminants are constantly moving and spreading out."



EXPERT EXPLAINS — Rick Stump, laboratory director at Suburban Water Testing Labs, Frederick, explains the process used to detect the presence of chemicals in water samples. The readings given are practically 100 percent reliable, Stump said.

Mercury Photos by Tom Kelly



CHEMICAL DETECTOR — Water samples gathered by The Mercury and taken to Suburban Water Testing Labs in Frederick and Temple were run through this device — a gas chromatograph — which detected any chemicals present. The chromatograph separates substances in the water. A bubble of nitrogen is injected into each sample, which forces the volatiles to move from the water to the gas. The vapor is then heated, which separates the compounds. After they are separated, the conductivity of each compound is measured by a detector. The concentrations of each chemical then are printed out on a chart.