

Some link Alaska quake to cloudy Berks water

Testing experts believe the muddy liquid flowing from some taps is the result of sediment stirred in wells.

By Mike Urban
Reading Eagle

The major earthquake that shook Alaska may have stirred up wells in Berks County, causing muddy water to flow from faucets in some county homes.

Although the quake occurred more than 3,000 miles away, its geological ripples seem to have reached this part of Pennsylvania, said Richard Stump III, lab manager for Suburban Water Testing Labs Inc. in Temple.

The company received 20 muddy-water calls in three days, more than it usually receives in a

year, Stump said.

Dirt and bacteria sit at the bottom of every well, and the quake, which struck at 5:13 p.m. on Sunday, seems to have redistributed those particles, he said.

"People woke up Monday and found discolored water coming out of their faucets," he said.

Phares Fry Well Drilling of Virginville usually receives three or four calls a week about dirty water, but at least 20 calls from Berks, Schuylkill and Lehigh counties have come in since the weekend, said president George R. Fontanesi.

"A well is a hole in the ground, and a tremor can cause sediment to shake loose," he said.

The only other possible cause of the discolored water is the 9 inches of rain that have fallen locally in the past 45 days, he said.

"That rain could have re-

charged the groundwater and washed bacteria into those wells," he said. "Maybe it is a combination of the heavy rain and the earthquake."

C.S. Garber and Sons Inc., a well-drilling company in Boyertown, received more than 10 reports of dirty water since Monday, said water-conditioning manager Ed Bankes. The firm normally gets only a couple of calls per week.

"It's hard to say whether the earthquake has caused this, but something strange is going on," Bankes said.

Two homeowners along the same road in Fleetwood called with similar complaints of muddy water, Bankes said.

He told those residents, and the others who have called, to be patient.

"If they continue to run their

water, it should clear up soon," Bankes said.

Suburban Water Testing is performing bacteria tests on some of the disturbed wells, but Stump does not believe the problems will persist.

"If the dirty water does continue, it could be that the geological shift moved the home to a different aquifer," he said. "Then we would recommend water treatment."

The earthquake, which struck a remote area near Denali National Park, had a magnitude of 7.9.

It also caused ocean-like waves on a Washington lake, unusual tides in Galveston, Texas, and ripples in swimming pools on the East Coast, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

■ Contact reporter **Mike Urban** at 610-371-5023 or murban@readingeagle.com.



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Alaska Quake Muddies Wells 3,000 Miles Away; Pennsylvania Residents Grapple With Brown Tap Water

By Bill Bergstrom
Associated Press Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - The weekend earthquake in Alaska that churned up waves on a Louisiana lake and rippled swimming pools all over the country also temporarily muddied well water in homes more than 3,000 miles away, geologists said.

Well-drilling companies got scores of calls Sunday and Monday from Pennsylvania customers complaining about water turning cloudy or muddy.

"It was really brown, like diluted iced tea," said Joanne Volm of Harleysville. "The kids didn't want to bathe in it."

U.S. Geological Survey offices around the country were inundated with calls after the 7.9-magnitude quake hit at 5:13 p.m. EST Sunday a remote region near Alaska's Denali National Park. Ocean-like waves rolled ashore on a lake in Washington state, boats were tossed around on Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana, and water sloshed around in swimming pools around across the East.

Waverly Person, a USGS geophysicist in Golden, Colo., said stirred-up wells also were widespread.

"This type of phenomenon happens with big, shallow earthquakes," Person said. "The surface waves from this earthquake were recorded for hours and they were just rolling around and around the earth."

In Temple, 50 miles northwest of Philadelphia, homeowners with wells started calling within hours, said Richard C. Stump II of Suburban Water Testing Labs Inc.

"Starting Sunday night and into Monday morning people were reporting that their wells were turning a muddy color," Stump said.

At least 10 people called a Montgomery County well driller, Miller Pump Service of Cedars, with the same complaint, Rhea Gross of Miller's service department said.

Heavy rain muddies wells "once in a while, but not that many, scattered all around," Gross said.

No serious injuries were reported in Sunday's quake, but officials estimated the damage to Alaska highways would cost \$20 million to repair.

On the Net:

National Earthquake Information Center: <http://neic.usgs.gov/>

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