

Local A&M scientists say local water may harm plants

By JOYCE HALLBAUER
Battalion Reporter

Health problems among people and plants could be caused by trace elements in water, say two Texas A&M University professors. Dr. William P. Fife, acting head of the biology department, and Dr. McWilliams, a professor in the horticulture department, are researching the effects on plants of minerals in tap water.

Sodium and other minerals like flouride have been the object of theories and studies concerning their effects on humans. Fife said. One theory is that chances of developing heart disease are increased by living in an area with soft water, he said. Soft water has low concentrations of minerals in it.

Let some scientists say humans may need trace elements in tap water that distilled water cannot provide. "Micro-quantities of trace elements could be helping or deteriorating our health," Fife said, "but no one knows for sure yet."

Theories on flouride abound, Fife said, such as the idea that flouride in water pipes. Even oxygen can kill if it is four times the normal concentration, he said. "Nothing is completely safe and can be toxic if taken in large enough quantities," Fife said.

Other reports have blamed sodium as a culprit in kidney and hypertension problems, he said. Most people suffer no harm from sodium if they have healthy kidneys and a good metabolism to prevent salt buildup.

"A person cannot say the presence of sodium in water is all bad," he said, "because a certain amount is needed by humans to replace what is lost in perspiration." Even patients with kidney problems who are on low sodium diets are allowed one gram of salt per day, said Dr. Fred Anderson, a nephrologist in Bryan.

Let some hypertensive patients are asked to use distilled water, said Dr. Fred Anderson, a nurse at an internal medicine clinic in Bryan. Distilled water doses are not only recommended for people, but also for plants.

An article in the Texas Agricultural Progress Quarterly said certain sensitive plants should be watered with distilled or rain water. McWilliams said the sodium chloride in municipal water of the Bryan-College Station area may kill or limit growth of plants such as geraniums, geraniads (relatives of African violets), prayer plants, orchids and azaleas. If tap water is used, flushing the soil with a heavy watering will reduce salt levels in the soil.

Another alternative to using distilled water for plants is to grow salt-tolerant plants like succulents or cacti, McWilliams said. He said these findings are the result of studies conducted at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station using Bryan and College Station water.

The sodium chloride level is about 183 milligrams per liter of water in Bryan, said Michael Collins, chief operator of the Bryan Water Production Department. College Station water has about 193 milligrams per liter, a Texas A&M physical plant employee said. Both are below the 300 milligrams per liter allowed by the Texas Department of Health standards.

Water quality varies a great deal across Texas but all the water is treated by the same standards, said Gerald Baum, a geologist with the Texas Department of Water Resources. These standards are set by the Texas Department of Health.

The division of Water Hygiene tests samples of raw water (untreated water from the source) from public water supplies to determine levels of elements such as flouride, sodium chloride, iron and manganese, said Tom Natier, engineering assistant with the Texas Department of Health.

A certain amount of iron will make water look red just as a combination of iron and manganese will make water look gray, but neither is a health hazard, Natier said. Flouride may cause mottling or discoloration of teeth but only in very high concentrations, Natier said. He also said sodium chloride is not considered a health hazard.

One factor affecting the levels of sodium in water is the depth of the wells from which it is taken, Collins said. The deeper wells have more sodium chloride than the shallow wells since the water becomes saltier. This is due to pressure exerted by the rock as the water seeps down, and the hot water dissolves sodium in the rock, he said.

Yet so far, the water supplies in Bryan and College Station have met state standards, Collins said. "Our number one function is to provide quality water for residential and industrial use of the citizen."

Alertness increases summer water safety

With more than half a million boat owners in Texas, boating safety is a timely topic as summer approaches, says an official of the Texas Safety Association. In fact, Gov. Bill Clements has declared June 7-13 Safe Boating Week in Texas to impress upon boating enthusiasts the merits of safe boating, said Nelson Mueller, vice president for home and care activities, in a press release.

The observance will coincide with National Safe Boating Week. "Safety and accident prevention behavior will save lives and increase the quality of water recreation for all Texans," says the governor's proclamation on safe boating. The instrument points out that 375 accidental drownings, many related to boating, occurred in 1980.

"It's very hard for boaters speeding across the water to spot a swimmer's head. And even if boaters are alert, they might not be able to avoid swimmers that suddenly appear," the release says. Mueller suggests the following safety tips for boaters:

- Continually scan the water ahead of the boat for objects in the water, particularly swimmers. Heading directly into the sun makes vision ahead difficult. Wear a sun visor or sun glasses.
- Before making a turn, look over the water in the direction of the turn.
- Never run too close to an anchored or drifting boat; swimmers might be near.
- Always expect to find swimmers beyond the authorized swimming areas. If you see one, expect to find more.

Rodeo will benefit memorial scholarship

The family and friends of a former Texas A&M University student who died from injuries received in a rodeo will sponsor a benefit rodeo Sunday.

The rodeo will honor Tommy Castenson, 22, who died March 17, three days after a bull threw him during a contest in Fort Worth. The event was previously scheduled for May 24 but was postponed due to rain.

All proceeds from the rodeo will benefit the Tommy Castenson Memorial Scholarship Fund at Sam Houston State University where Castenson was a senior at the time of his death.

The scholarship funds will go to an agricultural major or majors at Sam Houston, said Paul Castenson, Tommy's older brother. Castenson attended Texas A&M prior to enrolling at Sam Houston as an agriculture and economics major. He is survived by three brothers and six sisters, including Beth Castenson, a junior physical therapy major from Bryan. Three of the nine siblings are graduates of Texas A&M, and three others have also attended Texas A&M.

Castenson's parents are Mr. and Mrs. R.C. Castenson of Bryan. An auction will also be held during the rodeo to raise money for the memorial fund, and a saddle will be raffled off.

Admission for the performance, which begins at 2 p.m. at the Brazos County Rodeo Arena, will be \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for children age 12 and under.

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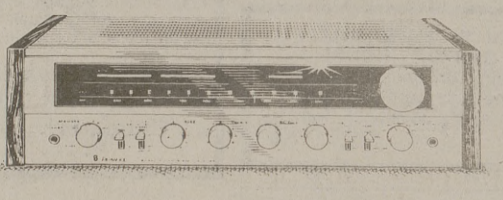
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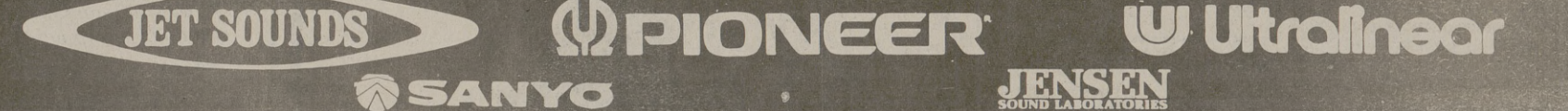
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