



JOHN MEORE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Thomas Merjanian holds a glass of tap water in the kitchen of his Valley Cottage home on Friday. The Merjanian's will not use the tap water due to its smell and taste. For the past month, they have refused to drink, cook or even brush their teeth with it.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY WATER?

Clarkstown couple refuse to drink it

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VALLEY COTTAGE - Thomas Merjanian filled a glass with water from his kitchen faucet and took a sip on a recent weekday morning.

A grimace quickly flashed across his face. "I'm tasting earth, something metallic," said Merjanian, 73, after tasting his tap water for the first time in three weeks. "I'm not a scientist, but it certainly tastes like it's something you should not have in your system."

The water that flows into Merjanian's faucets is supplied by Suez New York. Merjanian and his wife, Meline, said the they have been raising a stink over the smell and taste of their tap water for the past month.

They have since refused to drink, cook or even brush their teeth with the tap water.

"It's so bad you can't swallow it. You think you're drinking metal," said Meline Merjanian, 71, after doing her own taste test. "What's in the water? ... We never tasted this ... It's worse by the day."

Suez said the water it provides to customers is safe, according to spokesman Bill Madden.

"Rockland's water is safe for cooking, drinking and bathing, and continues to meet or exceed regulatory drinking water standards," Madden said. "New York state has the most stringent regulations in the nation."

But there was a spike in customer complaints about the taste and smell of their water in October, Madden said.

The taste and odor issues — which are typically described as smelling and tasting "earthy" — have been blamed on a lack of rainfall and unseasonably dry conditions, Madden said. Suez serves about 300,000 customers in Rockland County.

Madden said the taste and odor problems have affected customers in parts of Clarkstown, Haverstraw,

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JOHN MEORE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Meline Merjanian stands in the kitchen of her Valley Cottage home with a bottle of store bought water on Friday.



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A water tank on Mountainview Avenue in Valley Cottage on Friday.

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Water

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and Orangetown.

"This is a temporary condition, and we expect the water to return to normal characteristics as the temperature and rainfall return to seasonal levels," he said. "These are unusual circumstances."

Suez also posted an advisory on Facebook.

"Suez customers in Rockland County may have recently noticed a change in the taste and odor of their drinking water," the Oct. 26 post read. "This is mainly due to the extended warm and dry weather pattern that has reduced levels of water in Lake DeForest reservoir to 20 percent less than the average for this time of year."

Drought conditions have persisted throughout Rockland in the previous months, as well as northern New Jersey.

Dry conditions led the county to impose mandatory water-use restrictions in July; They were lifted in September.

But the county remains under a "severe drought" warning, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor's weekly report issued on Thursday.

Suez's Lake DeForest reservoir is now at 66 percent of capacity, Madden said.

He said major rainfall in the previous week has mitigated many of the taste and odor issues, and complaints have decreased. He added that smell and taste are "subjective," and people can have varying sensitivities.

At The Journal News/



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Thomas Merjanian stands in the kitchen of his Valley Cottage home on Friday. The Merjanian's will not use the water from their tap due to the smell and taste.

lohud office in West Nyack, which gets its water from Suez, the tap water on Friday had a mildly unpleasant aroma, accompanied by a taste that was stale and reminiscent

of chlorine. A few sips left a noticeable aftertaste.

Discolored water

Elsewhere in Rockland, water supplied by

Suez has had other issues.

Maria Molders said discolored water began flowing from the faucets in her Stony Point home about eight months ago. The water, which was accompanied by an occasional foul smell, stained her toilets and bathtub, Molders said.

"It had a chemical taste," she said. "The water was not clear, and it tastes like a chemical — a sulfur kind of taste. You have to let it settle before it clears."

Molders said she was concerned about any potential health issues related to her water, whether the sediment could damage her pipes, and whether it could affect the value of her house.

She said she had been using bottled instead of tap water for months but switched over to well water about three months ago.

"My whites are coming out white now when I do the laundry. I don't have that smell anymore," Molders said.

Madden said Suez was not experiencing any discoloration issues throughout its system. He added that taste and discoloration were "two separate issues."

Discoloration typically happens when naturally occurring minerals — primarily iron and manganese — flow into water, Madden said. The miner-

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MELINE MERJANIAN
VALLEY COTTAGE RESIDENT

als settle in pipelines when water usage is low, such as during the winter, and are stirred up and come out of faucets when flow and pressure through the pipes increases again.

Discoloration can also occur when hydrants are flushed, during water main breaks, or by construction work to the pipe system.

As for the Merjanians, they said neither boiling nor using filters will make their water taste better.

The couple now buys gallon-sized bottles of water from the supermarket every week. They also run a day-care business out of their home, near Nyack High School, and refuse to give tap water to the children.

In the dining room, Meline Merjanian pointed to the floor where more than a half-dozen gallons of bottled water sat on the floor.

"I go through six to eight a week," she said. "And we pay so much money for the water bill. It's extra money that we don't have."

The Merjanians agreed the water had never tasted so bad.

"I've never had this flavor," Thomas Merjanian said. "I have been drinking this water since 1971, when I moved to Rockland County."

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