



Gloucester County Times

New weapon for war on sodium

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Once seen as a miracle, the ability to turn salt water into drinkable water has come a long way.

Putting sea water through a desalination process to make it potable has been credited with spurring growth in the Middle East. In the United States, most places haven't had to turn to oceans or briny bays as drinking water sources, and besides, treatment can be expensive.

But many Americans drink tap water that has too much sodium, especially given that it can elevate blood pressure and contribute to related diseases. And despite a vow by food processors to gradually reduce sodium levels in prepared foods, we're not there yet.

An interesting new pilot project in Monroe Township could help bring less sodium for all in drinking water, inexpensively. Clayton-based Hungerford and Terry is testing an ion-exchange-based process on Municipal Well 13 in Monroe, where samples show water with sodium levels just above the state's 50-milligram-per-liter limit.

This section of Gloucester County is known for natural deposits that make some well water contain more sodium than is recommended for good health. Sodium intrusion also has been an issue for drinking water systems in communities close to the Delaware River.

The hope in Monroe is that this ion exchange system can leave this Jackson Road well's water sodium-free at low cost. Before, when this water had to be treated to remove sodium, officials say, a more costly reverse osmosis process had to be used. Since it also strips the water of other beneficial (and taste producing) minerals like calcium and magnesium, these had to be added back in chemical form.

The state Department of Environmental Protection will monitor test results, but a spokesman says it hasn't yet endorsed the ionization process for Monroe or anywhere else. It's nice to see a Gloucester County company work with a Gloucester County town on a promising treatment idea. If successful, it could see broad application. Even if it just provides a unique solution to Well 13's problem, that would be welcome.

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