

# Water problems leave a bad taste

**By DOUG FRASER  
STAFF WRITER**

Eastham's drinking water supply is like an old car, says Karl Weiss, chairman of the town's water resource advisory board. It's showing signs of age, nickel and diming the owner.

Unfortunately, the fix for drinking water is far more costly than for a car. At their Monday night meeting, selectmen will hear an estimate of \$73 million to \$75 million for a townwide municipal water system.

The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. at Eastham Town Hall.

Eastham is one of just three Cape towns that largely depend on private wells for drinking water. Wellfleet and Truro are the others.

For years, the town's water quality samples from these wells has shown a steady increase in the level of nitrates in most areas of town. Scientists test for nitrates because they are easier to detect than other contaminants, such as disease-causing organisms and chemical pollutants, and because they are present in higher levels in septic system effluent.

The town also is monitoring the wells of 300 homes in the path of a plume from the former landfill.

"The end is clear, the only question is when" said Weiss. "The time is now to bite the bullet."

With evidence of declining water quality across the town, officials needed to look at the problem long term, said Town Administrator Sheila Vanderhoef.

Eastham must also tackle wastewater issues to comply with the federal Clean Water Act mandate to reduce septic pollution of the town's coastal waters. That will be even more expensive. Preliminary estimates are \$300 million to sewer areas around Town Cove and the Nauset estuary.

"To do drinking water first made sense. It's less expensive than sewerage," said Vanderhoef.

While the dollar amounts sound staggering, Vanderhoef is working on a plan that would be executed over several years.. Bonds would be taken out in five different phases from 2012 to 2024 to pay for the design and permitting, then for bringing water to different parts of town. As each section is connected to municipal water, revenues from users would help offset the cost of bonding.

The first task would be to find enough water to supply the estimated 2 million to 3 million gallons per day needed for the whole town.

The town is talking with Orleans about getting a half million gallons from their water supply wells to service South Eastham, said Martin Boelitz, vice-chairman of the water resource advisory board. Other possible Eastham well sites still have to be tested for their daily potential yield. The town is also talking with Wellfleet about developing a well field together.

Vanderhoef said the problems of drinking water and wastewater are regional and it could be less expensive for towns to band together instead of developing separate systems.

"It's a lot of money for a little town like Eastham to come up with," she said.

Doug Fraser can be reached at [dfraser@capecodonline.com](mailto:dfraser@capecodonline.com).

(Published: March 10, 2007)

**Copyright © Cape Cod Times. All rights reserved.**