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ALABAMA A & M AND AUBURN UNIVERSITIES

Possible Treatments Questions To Ask When Shopping For Water Treatment Equipment

In response to recent public concern about water quality, the home water treatment industry now offers consumers a wide variety of products. When faced with so many choices, consumers often wonder what, if any, water treatment system they need.

Consider using the following questions as a guide when shopping for home water treatment devices:

What exactly does my water test show? Are health hazards indicated? Should more testing be done?

Many water treatment companies include in their services free in-home testing of water. But not all contaminants can be evaluated this way. For example, organics, which have been associated with serious health problems, must be analyzed in a laboratory with sophisticated equipment.

The consumer must be wary of home analyses claiming to determine more than basic water quality constituents such as hardness, pH, iron, and sulfur.

Does the water quality problem require whole-house treatment or will a single-tap device be adequate?

Although less than 1 percent of tap water is used for drinking and cooking, some contaminants are as hazardous when inhaled or absorbed through the skin as when ingested. Treatment of all the water used in the household may be required. Reverse osmosis and distillation units are usually connected to a single tap; activated carbon devices can be installed on a single tap or where water enters the house. The device selected depends upon the type of contaminant in question.

Will the system I am considering adequately address the specific water quality problem? Was the product tested for the specific contaminant in question, over the advertised life of the treatment device, under household conditions (tap water, actual flow rates, and pressures)?

How many gallons of treated water does the unit produce per day? Is the amount sufficient for my family's needs?

Before you buy, be certain that enough treated water will be produced for everyday use. The maximum flow rate should be sufficient for the peak home use rate.

Is there sufficient water supply for the treatment unit to work properly?

What maintenance is required?

Devices such as activated carbon units, reverse osmosis units, and oxidizing (iron) filters need routine maintenance. The homeowner should be fully informed of maintenance requirements.

How would I know if the unit is not working properly? Is there an alarm or indicator light on the device to alert me to a malfunction?

Many units have backup systems or shutoff functions to prevent consumption of untreated water.

What is the expected lifetime of the product? What is the length of the warranty period, and what does the warranty cover?

The warranty may cover only certain parts of a device, so the consumer should be aware of the warranty conditions.

What is the total cost? Does it include purchase price, installation, maintenance, and operation costs?

The consumer must watch for hidden costs such as separate installation fees, monthly maintenance fees, or equipment rental fees. Additionally, the disposal of waste materials such as reject water, spent cartridges from activated carbon units, and used filters can add to the cost of water treatment and should be figured into the purchase price. Some devices can be installed by the homeowner.

Will the manufacturer include in the purchase price a retesting of the water after a month or two?

Testing the water a month after the device is installed will assure the homeowner that the unit is accomplishing the intended treatment.

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If I rent the equipment, does my agreement include an option-to-buy provision?

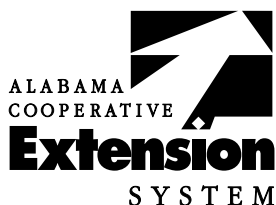
Have the product and the manufacturer been rated by NSF International or other third party organizations?

NSF International, whose function is similar to Underwriter's Laboratory, sets performance standards for water treatment devices. Because companies can make unsubstantiated statements regarding product effectiveness, the consumer must evaluate test results of the device to determine if claims are realistic.

How long has the company been in business and is there a list of referrals?

Reference

Wagenet, Linda, and Ann Lemley. 1988. Questions To Ask When Purchasing Water Treatment Equipment. New York Cooperative Extension Service. Cornell University. Ithaca, NY.



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