



HOME WATER TREATMENT DEVICES

Home water treatment devices are often used by consumers to improve the taste of their tap water. Others treat their water because of specific health concerns and the desire to take extra precautions against a particular contaminant. Whatever your reason for considering a home water treatment device, we would like to offer the following advice:

- * Learn about the quality of your drinking water. Water utilities, such as the county Department of Water Supply, provide consumer confidence reports to each of their customers. These summarize the quality of the drinking water and identify detected contaminants.
- * Determine why you want to treat your water. For example, what chemical contaminant or microorganisms are you trying to remove?
- * Select a treatment unit that has been tested and certified by an appropriate, independent testing organization for the reduction of the desired contaminant. The National Sanitation Foundation, Underwriter's Laboratories, and Water Quality Association are all accredited for testing and certifying water treatment devices by the American National Standards Institute. Verify the certification of the selected unit and be sure that you understand any limitations associated with the certification.
- * Buyers beware! Do a lot of research, shop around, ask questions, and be wary of potential deceptive sales practices. Please refer to the Federal Trade Commission information noted in the last section.
- * Carefully read and follow the manufacturer's instructions or operating manual. All home treatment devices require proper installation, as well as regular maintenance, in order to operate properly. For example, filter cartridges need to be changed on a regular basis (likely based on both the time in use and the amount of water treated) as recommended by the manufacturer.

Other Potential Concerns

In certain instances, home treatment devices can cause other unintended problems:

- * Any filter can become a breeding ground for microorganisms, particularly when not replaced regularly or maintained as directed by the manufacturer.
- * Careful consideration must be given when installing a home treatment device capable of removing disinfectants, such as chlorine, ahead of all household piping (a.k.a., point-of-entry or whole house system). For example, when a granular activated carbon filter is installed at the point-of-entry to a home for the purposes of removing chlorine, the treated water will have low or no disinfectant, thereby allowing bacteria to grow unchecked throughout the rest of the home plumbing system.
- * Water softeners may add sodium to drinking water while removing calcium and magnesium. This could be an issue for people trying to limit their sodium intake.
- * Reverse osmosis units can waste a significant amount of water.

Where to Get More Information

The following websites may provide helpful information on drinking water quality and the selection and use of home water treatment devices:

- * Most water utilities are required to provide their customers with an annual water quality report (a.k.a., consumer confidence report). If you are serviced by one of the four county water departments, your report can be accessed on their web sites:

Maui Department of Water Supply:
www.mauiwater.org/waterquality.html

Honolulu Board of Water Supply:
www.hbws.org/cssweb/display.cfm?sid=1081

Hawaii Department of Water Supply:
www.hawaiidws.org/ccrpage.htm

Kauai Department of Water:
www.kauaiwater.org/waterqualityrpt_pdf.asp

- * The National Sanitation Foundation is recognized internationally throughout the water industry and has a very informative web site with certified product listings:
http://www.nsf.org/consumer/drinking_water/dw_treatment.asp?program=WaterTre
- * The Underwriters Laboratories also certifies home water treatment units and lists them on its web site: www.ul.com/water/prodcert/waterqry.html
- * The Water Quality Association is an association of manufacturers, distributors, and dealers of water treatment systems for household, commercial, and industrial applications. They maintain a listing of certified units on their web site: www.wqa.org
- * The United States Environmental Protection Agency's web site provides some useful information on water treatment and more general information on the topic of drinking water:
www.epa.gov/safewater/faq/pdfs/fs_healthseries_filtration.pdf
www.epa.gov/safewater/wot/pdfs/book_waterontap_full.pdf
- * Useful information on buying home water treatment units as well as consumer protection issues, originally developed in 1989 by the Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection with assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can be found at:
www.doityourself.com/info/homewatertreatments.htm
www.doityourself.com/info/homewater.htm
- * Consumer Reports magazine (www.consumerreports.org) has frequently published articles on home water treatment devices. Past issues (e.g., "Fit to Drink?" January 1990, "Is There Lead In Your Water?" and "Water Treatment Devices" February 1993, "Should You Use a Water Filter?" July 1997, etc.) of Consumer Reports magazine may be available for review at your local public library.