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## Arsenic On Salt Spring, The Untold Story...

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I've been questioned about the "**Arsenic on Salt Spring**" story far to many times over the years. This website has been up for several years... during this time I've received a good number of emails from all over North America, some from other countries but many more from Canada. Every year a percentage of these emails or phone calls are people consistently asking about the [Salt Spring Island](#) arsenic water wells... people usually have little substantial information but the contamination story still lingers after all this time. I receive all kinds of questions... I would like to make a few comments.

**First off the situation I became involved with on Salt Spring Island** was in August 2000... originally I was hired to perform some contracting work on some of the wells in a subdivision by the developer. I was not the person who discovered the arsenic contaminated wells in this development... unknown to me at the time, **documented information was known to others** long before I arrived on-site. The Groundwater Impact Analysis was a \$5000.00 report prepared by a Victoria Hydrologist back in 1997, it was filed with the local Islands Trust office... one of the approving offices for this development. The report was paid for by the developer, **I was contacted by the Hydrologist** who informed me that the Arsenic contamination had been pointed out to the developer as contained in the report. I was simply the person who recognized the **possible non-disclosure** concern after I had assessed the report and advised the property owners accordingly.

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## Things Quickly Turned Into A Media Frenzie

**Within hours I had received calls from the media** wanting interviews, both TV and the papers. By the time the evening news aired one of the possible defendants had their mug shot all over the evening news looking like one of **Canada's "Most Wanted,"** it wasn't a pretty picture.

Obviously some of the property owners who had purchased these lots with homes were deeply concerned, they felt violated... they'd been consuming the contaminated water for some time, **no one including myself** was up-to-date on "Arsenic Poisoning Symptoms" at that point. The data I had assessed from the Impact Analysis certainly indicated **there was definitely sufficient reason for concern.**

The Arsenic Story is one of the main reasons this website came to be and it's why I continue to write about water well problems. Suddenly some of the homeowners were thrown into what began as a class-action law-suit, it's scary stuff! The final case took nearly **5 years from the date of discovery to settle.** It was gut-wrenching to watch what the plaintiffs had to endure but they had to follow through. Each of them had purchased their properties in good faith but they were soon living a nightmare.

At time of purchase they **were** provided a basic coliform bacteria report as requested by the banks it was given from the same Groundwater Impact Analysis insuring the water was potable but **they were not given the chemistry reports** which were also available in the same report, just on

another page... that's all they would have needed as potential purchasers to make an educated decision, the problem was clearly indicated!

After doing as much of this work as I have over the years you get pretty good at reading between the lines, you can almost **climb into someone's brain** and figure out exactly what they were thinking at the time, especially when you have the documents... **in this case, what I was piecing together was unthinkable** - I realized someone was in possession of a very warped brain! **Arsenic Is A Known Carcinogen**, we were dealing with substantial levels of it.

**Had this information been disclosed**, you can't help but wonder if some of those lots would still be sitting on the market to this very day... it's just not something most people would want to sign-up for unless they decide to make other arrangements, either rainwater harvest or water hauling, for a few that's quite acceptable... if you can get a mortgage lender to go along with that program. **It can certainly affect the resale value.**

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## This Is Not A Salt Spring Island Issue

Litigation was very costly, emotionally it took a terrible toll on the property owners. At some point I heard it mentioned **that the homeowners had to agree to gag orders**, as part of their settlement requirements. **Well so far no one has managed to gagged me!** The settlements barely covered the horrendous legal fees and costs... the costs were debilitating, they needed many environmental professionals involved.

Just the property appraisals alone had to be done by an **Environmental Appraiser...** I was told it was a person from back east one who specialized in landfill and environmental contamination! In the end there was a **small amount** received by the homeowners themselves after the costs and legal fees were all paid out... I believe that most of the properties are still serviced by the same original arsenic water wells. Likely, **there would have been little point in re-drilling** for new wells, even if enough money was available to them after settling. I firmly believe that arsenic may show up in any additional wells that are ever drilled on that mountain in the future.

**I finally write this story for a few reasons...** I found this 5 year process very difficult, I tried to help and support as much as I was able but when the lawyers take over, you just helplessly stand back and watch everyone's lives slowly unravel. I still get questioned about this case to this day, there is great interest. I've been working as a Groundwater Consultant for nearly 15 years on pretty much all the Gulf Islands. I've specialized in Real Estate deals involving water wells... sometimes it can be difficult to resolve all the problems that people get themselves into. I deal often with the unknown and it's my job to figure it out and make it known, some files can become quite complicated.

**Every year without fail** I deal with at least two or three nasty groundwater situations... problems that people should not be involved in but they are because they dealt in good faith and may even have been lied to. They were likely completely uninformed about water well problems especially something like arsenic contamination. Perhaps the Real Estate market was really hot when they purchased and the **genius representing the purchaser** told them there are *three more people waiting to make an offer* on the same property which **can put a purchaser under duress...** as a result they can end up with a purchase agreement that walks them right into the slaughterhouse! In this business ignorance is not bliss... in fact it can cause a lot of problems!

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## Let's Put This Into Perspective

This is **not just a Salt Spring Island issue...** Sometimes I get calls from potential purchasers thinking that the entire island has arsenic contamination problems. As far as I know the cases have been isolated, my overall study on the island has been quite minimal, there are lots of water wells on Salt Spring Island. I've done quite a bit of work on the island over the years, so far I've not run into another Arsenic well, but that means

little.

I have seen just a few other arsenic wells **not** on Salt Spring Island with elevated Arsenic levels, the wells are out there but they **may never be discovered**. Occasionally an arsenic well will just pop up... but it doesn't mean the entire area or subdivision or island is contaminated but it also could concern a much larger area or greater number of wells. **There are areas on the Sunshine Coast** which have a large number of arsenic wells, I've heard of them often over the years. **It could be isolated** to one well or many water wells, there's nothing written in stone on this subject. The best always is not to get yourself backed into a corner, do your due diligence!

What matters now is we need to understand the **publicity still lingers quite strongly around this beautiful island** many years later. **As terrible as this was for the individuals** involved it does not mean that the entire island has an arsenic concern or that other areas through-out country don't have an arsenic concern. There are many domestic water wells which have not had a thorough metal scan performed... when I'm called out to inspect I insist on it and you should too. **If you're selling a Real Estate** it makes much more sense to get this stuff together prior to listing... if you do have a concern then it can be dealt with prior to an offer coming in... *why are we waiting for offers first?* **Has your Realtor explained this to you?**

**Last but not least I receive calls and emails asking me which is the best arsenic filter to purchase**, I'm not an arsenic specialist but arsenic is not removed by simply running it through an arsenic filter... arsenic is dissolved / in solution, it requires much more of a process than filtration alone. **We don't have standard arsenic filters**, there will always be a percentage that may not be removed and that % will increase as the system ages, even the remaining % can exceed permissible limits.

**Maintenance is always an issue...** the system will only work as well as it's maintained and often that's not too much especially if it's a little complicated. I see this all the time, we build these systems for people but can't always get people to care for them properly. It can require an experienced operator and **the average homeowner does not want to pay if it's too costly**, soon the system becomes neglected. Would you like to drink water from a neglected arsenic treatment system? Water is simply a costly business on many fronts.

During the legal process I reviewed some treatment solutions... the cost was high, to do it properly. I was also informed, **I was not to put the backwash water** from any arsenic treatment system that we built back into the ground as **the backwash was considered toxic material/waste...** but it certainly wasn't a problem to pump this water into the homes of the plaintiffs and deem it potable water!

Sort of like the gag order thing... some people think it's fine to violate others, **then use financial power** to have them verbally gagged! This experience still sickens me and it will remain with me well into my old age... as a result of what I've seen I've done a lot of writing over the years, **I write to prevent this kind of suffering for others.**

*Folks, please pay attention to what you are getting yourselves into out there.*

The intention of this site is not to offer legal advice but general information based on my 20 years of experience working in the Groundwater and Water Well Industry. If you have any questions please,

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### **Colleen's Dehydration Tip:**

**Constipation during dehydration, the colon removes more water than usual in order to provide enough water for other parts of the body.**

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