

Cary Families' Faucets Delivered Treated Wastewater

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Vinay Jain knew his tap water tasted funny, but he wouldn't have guessed his family had been drinking treated wastewater that is supposed to be used for watering lawns.

That turned out to be the case at his home, the discovery coming after workers shut off an irrigation pipe in Jain's neighborhood. His neighbors had tap water but couldn't get their sprinklers to work. Jain's sprinklers worked fine, but the taps inside his house ran dry.

It's unclear how the piping got switched.

About 500 homes in the town have irrigation systems served by reclaimed water. As a precaution, Cary officials were going house to house to check for similar problems.

Cary Public Works head Mike Bajorek said crews have found one other home in town in a similar situation.

Both families are being put up in hotels while their pipes are flushed with a powerful chlorine mixture, Bajorek said. The water will be tested to make sure it's safe to drink before the families are allowed to move back home, he said.

Jain, meanwhile, isn't pleased his family had a reversed connection for nearly five months.

"In a place like Cary, it never even occurred to me that this might even be a possibility," said Jain, 37. "This gives the impression of a Third World country."

State regulations ban water systems from using the treated wastewater for drinking water. Cary officials said the risks are low, and that someone must drink a lot of water in one sitting to get an infectious dose of coliform bacteria.

Still, Jain and his wife, Priyanka, said they are second-guessing their children's claims of stomachaches at dinner.

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