

Taste and Odour – Info for residents

Most municipalities in Ontario which obtain their water supply from Lake Ontario experience periodically in the late summer or early fall taste and odour. These episodes are naturally occurring and caused by biological changes in the source water, which produces odour-causing compounds. These can be detected by humans at very low levels. Residents may notice a musty/earthy taste or odour in their drinking water. The unpleasant taste and odour may make one think that the water is “off”. But drinking water supplied via the municipal drinking water system remains safe to drink during these episodes. Seasonal taste and odour in drinking water are not a threat to public health and is common for water drawn from Lake Ontario. The Township is making every effort to reduce the impact of taste and odour events. The water treatment plants are equipped with ultrafiltration membranes designed to reduce the effects of taste and odour but may not eliminate it entirely. The taste and odour events vary from one year to another and are dependent on weather, water levels, etc. and therefore cannot be solved rapidly.

Frequently Asked Questions based on the calls we receive:

What causes the odour and the musty taste in the drinking water?

The odour is caused by trace levels of organic substances produced by plants, bacteria, and algae in the water. During extended warm temperatures the odour-causing compounds are more prominent. When water temperatures reach ~ 19 degrees Celsius and above, naturally occurring compounds which can create a musty odour or taste are formed. Odour levels are detectable differently by everyone. Some people can detect concentrations of odour as low as 3.8 parts per trillion. This is equivalent to 3.8 droplets of water in 1000 Olympic sized pools.

When does musty/earthy taste and odour occur?

While occurrence frequencies are difficult to predict, peaks of odour challenges can occur anytime from the end of July to the beginning of October each year. In the past, the events only occurred periodically with widely varying intensity.

Is the water safe to drink?

The Township’s water treatment process removes most of the odour present in Lake Ontario. Some sensitive customers may still notice an odour, especially when tap water is warmed up (e.g. showering or dishwashing). The Township’s drinking water is safe to drink. The odour or taste is strictly aesthetic. Our drinking water is sampled daily to ensure its safety and compliance with Ontario’s Safe Drinking Water Act.

What can be done by residents to reduce experienced taste and odour?

- Refrigerate a jug of water in your fridge. You may find chilled water more enjoyable.
- Add a few drops of lemon, lime, or orange to the water. This will reduce the taste and odour.
- Use a container, pitcher or fridge filter that has an activated carbon filter.