

Questions to Ask when Purchasing Water Treatment Equipment

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The home water treatment industry has expanded tremendously in recent years. New products are constantly being introduced which claim to solve a variety of water quality problems. Consumers often make costly decisions about water treatment equipment without being well-informed. Many people simply do not know what questions to ask to ensure wise investments. The following questions should be asked of water treatment manufacturers or distributors. These are guidelines to help you make informed choices about treating your home drinking water.

- **1. How long has the company been in business? Can I obtain a list of referrals?**

You can contact the Better Business Bureau or State Attorney General's Office to determine if any complaints have been received about the company. Ask other customers if they have been satisfied with the performance of the equipment and with the service of the company. If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to these questions for a particular company, do not purchase their equipment.

- **2. Are the product and the manufacturer rated by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) or the Water Quality Association (WQA) for performance?**

A product tested by an independent testing agency such as NSF or WQA will have a seal indicating that it meets industry standards for water treatment performance. Do not buy a device which does not have a seal indicating it meets standards.

- **3. Was the product tested for the specific contaminant in question, over the advertised life of the treatment device, under household conditions?**

You should examine test results of the device to determine if manufacturer's claims are realistic. If no test results are available, consider purchasing a different brand.

- **4. What exactly do water test results show, and should more testing be done?**

Many water treatment companies offer free analyses of your water before trying to sell you their products. You should have a qualified individual examine your test results before making any purchasing decisions based on free water tests. Your physician, County Health Department, or County Extension Office can help you evaluate water test results. Be wary of any in-home test which claims to determine more than basic water quality parameters such as pH, hardness, iron, and sulfur.

- **5. Does the specific water problem require whole-house treatment (point of entry) or a single-tap device (point of use)?**

The water treatment device selected depends on the contamination problem. Some contaminants may be hazardous when inhaled or absorbed through skin, as well as when ingested. In this case, all water used in the house should be treated. For most contaminants, treatment of only drinking and cooking water will provide safety at a much reduced cost.

- **6. Will the manufacturer retest the water in a month or two to check the performance of the recommended treatment device?**

You should ask for a written guarantee that the device will correct the specific problem, or the company will replace it or refund your money.

- **7. Will the device produce enough treated water to meet daily household requirements?**

The maximum flow rate should be adequate for peak home use rate. You may also need to check whether the water system has the capacity for the treatment unit's maintenance requirement. For example, be sure you have adequate pressure for a reverse osmosis unit.

- **8. Is there a shutoff system in case of malfunction? Is there an indicator light or alarm to alert me of a problem?**

Some units have shutoff systems and indicators to prevent you from consuming untreated water.

- **9. Does the device require maintenance, and how do I know when maintenance is necessary?**

Devices such as activated carbon units, reverse osmosis (RO) units, and iron filters require regular maintenance. Make sure you understand the cost and effort necessary to properly maintain equipment. Know how to contact company representatives if you have any questions after the device is installed.

- **10. Can I install the device and perform required maintenance, or do I have to rely on company service?**

You may be able to save a great deal of money with do-it-yourself equipment, but make sure the job is done right. Your money is wasted if equipment is not working properly. Find out if the warranty is voided if you perform maintenance on the device.

- **11. What are the total costs for purchase and maintenance, including labor for installation and service?**

Watch for hidden costs such as installation fees, regular maintenance fees, equipment rental fees, or costs associated with disposal of reject water or spent cartridges. Also ask about the electrical usage of the device.

- **12. What is the expected lifetime of the device? How long does the warranty last, and what does it cover?**

Consider the long-term cost of replacement or repair when making your purchase decision. Know all the requirements to keep the warranty in effect.

These questions serve as guidelines for consulting with water treatment equipment representatives. It is wise to shop around and get the best deal possible on the water treatment equipment you really need. Always get all guarantees and promises in writing and know how to contact the company selling you the equipment.

In addition to home water treatment, consider alternatives such as bottled water for drinking and elimination of the contamination source. Contact your County Extension Office for information on water testing, health effects of contaminated water, and treatment systems.

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