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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "OFFICIALS ISSUE WELL WARNING" NSB KINGS BAY GA  
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CAMDEN COUNTY TRIBUNE

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# Officials issue well warning

■ **Warning:** News does not concern many subdivision residents. See story page 12A.

**By Kelly Benton**

*Tribune Staff Reporter*

Approximately 500 homeowners in the Crooked River Plantation subdivision in St. Marys received word Monday that groundwater in the area could be contaminated with a known carcinogen.

Notices were hand-delivered by U.S. Navy personnel Monday after groundwater sampling in recent weeks at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base detected high levels of vinyl chloride, a solvent by-product, spreading from the old Camden County landfill which is located on base property.

St. Marys officials said this week that most homes in the subdivision are connected to the city's water system which is not contaminated, and drinking

water is safe to use.

The notices asked residents not to use water pumped out of private wells for consumption, irrigation or swimming pools.

Though Navy officials said they have not confirmed that contaminated groundwater has seeped into Crooked River Plantation, the alert was issued to warn residents of the potential danger until officials can determine how large of an area might be affected by the substance. Officials also are asking residents for permission to conduct tests on private property.

The notices urged Crooked River Plantation residents to attend a 7 p.m. public hearing Thursday night at Crooked River Elementary. City, Navy and environmental officials will answer questions and will address concerns about the contamination.

Federal regulations for drinking water will require in

## What is vinyl chloride?

- Vinyl chloride, a known cause of cancer, is a by-product of cleaning solvents such as Liquid Gold and chemicals used for the drycleaning process.
- Although it cannot be absorbed through skin, the substance mixes with water and evaporates when it is exposed to the air. Upon evaporation, vinyl chloride can be inhaled and, in high concentrations, could be unhealthy.

January that vinyl chloride not exceed a level of .002 micrograms per liter, or two parts per billion. Groundwater levels around the old county landfill have been recorded as high as 1,400 parts per billion, according to St. Marys Mayor Jerry Brandon.

Levels of the carcinogen have

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# Water: City water unaffected by chemical

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been recorded in groundwater at 30 parts per billion, 15 times higher than the acceptable drinking water levels across Crooked River Road, Brandon said.

Because the depth of the plume, or area of contaminated groundwater, does not exceed 25 feet, Brandon said city water is not affected.

Drinking water is drawn from several hundred feet below ground level, he said, and a thick clay layer provides a natural protective barrier between groundwater and drinking water.

"I'd say there is about a zero chance that the contamination has gone downward," Brandon said. "The area has changed horizontally, and chances of problems are really pretty slim, but we urge people to take the suggested precautions."

Fred Lehman, state Environmental Protection Division (EPD) drinking water program manager, said that the public water is safe from the contamination. Anyone operating strictly from a private well should switch

to public water immediately, Lehman said.

Bob Steller, Kings Bay public affairs spokesman, agreed that city water has not been effected by the contamination.

"The main reason for this public notice is to ask permission to test the groundwater on private property, and to learn who has private wells," Steller said.

Residents who dig private wells for any purpose are required by city codes to alert the city of their intentions, but Brandon said a majority of private wells are not recorded in the city's records.

"We have no way of estimating exactly how many homes have private wells in Crooked River, but it could be as many as 200 or 300," Brandon said.

Officials said vinyl chloride

cannot be absorbed through the skin. But, the substance mixes with water and evaporates when it is exposed to the air.

Upon evaporation, vinyl chloride can be inhaled and, in high concentrations, could be unhealthy, according to a Naval Base press release.

The notice will continue until either testing has determined that levels of vinyl chloride are at an acceptable level or the contaminated groundwater has been cleaned up.

"We will ask that people not drink or swim in the private well water for about one to two months to give them time to check it out, and if levels are unacceptable, which they may or may not be, we may ask that people discontinue using the water for several months," the mayor said.

Hopefully, no high levels of

vinyl chloride will be discovered, Brandon said.

"(In the worst case scenario, the problem may require treatment of the water before it is used," Brandon said.

The costly clean-up and treatment would, hopefully, be funded by the Department of Defense and the Navy superfunds, he said.

"Keep in mind that, if people inhale, say, watering their yards every day at the highest levels reported, the chances of harm are about like driving a car 50 miles down the road. The risk is very low," Brandon said.

The perimeter of the plume has not been determined, but Brandon said the area does include land on both sides of Crooked River Road near the Franklin Gate, spanning both base and off-base property.

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