The Town of Somerset's water system was recently in violation of an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) drinking water standard. Although this is not an emergency, you have a right to know what has happened, what you should do and what is being done to correct the situation.

The Town of Somerset's drinking water is disinfected with chlorine to kill bacteria. In addition to testing for bacteria in the distribution system, the water is also tested quarterly, at various sites throughout the distribution system for the presence of byproducts related to the disinfection process. The EPA sets standards for maximum levels of both disinfectants and disinfection byproducts (DBP's) in drinking water. This includes substances known as and collectively called Total Trihalomethanes or TTHM's.

The EPA Stage 2 DBP Rule which went into effect in 2012 requires water systems to meet "locational" running annual averages (LRAA) for Total Trihalomethanes at each of our four approved sampling locations. Historically since the early 1990's Somerset has had to report a combined running annual average of all samples collected in the distribution system and had met the EPA requirements. The compliance limits for TTHM'S are now calculated by averaging the quarterly results at each location. The LRAA results indicate that our system exceeded the maximum contaminate level for TTHM'S at one of four locations. The EPA standard for TTHM'S is 80 parts per billion (ppb). The LRAA value for the one location was 82 ppb. For reference, one part per billion is equivalent to one penny in ten million dollars.

What does this mean?
This is NOT an emergency, nor is there any imminent risk. If it had been an emergency situation, you would have been notified immediately through local media outlets. Some people who drink water containing Trihalomethanes in excess of the maximum contaminant level over many, many years may experience problems with their liver, kidneys or central nervous system and may have an increased risk of getting cancer. There are no known short-term acute impacts.

What should I do?
You DO NOT need to use an alternate water supply such as bottled water. However, if you have specific health concerns please consult your doctor.

What happened? What is being done?
TTHM'S form when free chlorine reacts with naturally occurring organic matter in water over time. Lowering TTHM levels may be achieved by removing organic matter, as is now done by the Water Treatment Facility, by flushing to reduce water age and by adding additional treatment processes to remove TTHM'S from drinking water. SWD is working with an engineer to reduce water age, understand TTHM formation in our distribution system and evaluating treatment alternatives to achieve compliance.

The risks of health impacts from TTHM'S is much lower than the risk of illness from drinking water that has not been disinfected. At present we are conducting our semi-annual distribution system flushing and will continue with our water quality system flushing plan. We also continue to work with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and our engineering consultant on a long-term corrective action which will ensure continued compliance with the TTHM standards.

For additional information, please contact the Town of Somerset Water Department @ (508) 674-4215 during regular business hours.