

'Drinkable from the tap'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Water flowing from your kitchen tap in your land-ed home is safe for consumption.

Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (Syabas) executive direc-tor (operations) V. Subramaniam gave this assurance, adding that there was no need for a home wa-ter filter system or for water to be boiled before being consumed.

He said the guidelines on na-tional drinking water standards set by the Ministry of Health (MOH) was stringent enough to determine that the drinking water was safe.

Syabas, a fully privatised entity took over the distribution of treat-ed water to consumers in Selan-gor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya in January 2005.

Subramaniam's assurance comes in the wake of questions raised about our water quality in a recent *New Sunday Times* article.

In a related report, the Chem-istry Department said no tests had been carried out to determine if tap water contained pharmaceu-ticals.

As at press time, questions sent to the MOH were not answered.



Syabas executive director (operations) V. Subramaniam

Subramaniam offered that the water quality standards set by the ministry was based on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) standards.

He said frequent checks on wa-ter samples based on set param-eters were commissioned by both the ministry and Syabas.

He said that although water from the kitchen tap, which was usually obtained directly from the main pipe, was safe for consump-

tion, water filters could indicate otherwise.

He explained that sediments which had settled in old pipes over time would cause the filter to turn brown. These sediments would also be "moved around" when wa-ter supply was disrupted and then restored following a pipe burst.

Iron and manganese content in water also make filters turn brownish.

"But these are within permissi-ble limits set by WHO and the min-istry. For example, there is an al-lowable limit of 5.0ntu for turbidi-ty (measurement of silt content in water). But this is not visible and the water is safe to drink."

When a home unit filter is used, Subramaniam explained, the fine sediments were also trapped. "That's why it will look brown."

He said consumers needed to change their perception that they needed a filter system at home, or that they could only consume boiled water.

"Chlorine, which is added to the water to ensure there is no bacter-ial contamination, is lost when the water is boiled. The water you get from the vending machines al-so does not have chlorine."

Subramaniam cautioned that

household filters which were not well-maintained could contami-nate drinking water.

He argued that it was "more worthwhile" to ensure that the in-ternal piping system in the home was well-maintained and rust-free.

To live up to the "filter test", Syabas is cleaning up some 13,000km of pipes through a flushing process on a six monthly basis.

Subramaniam said since it em-ployed the technique in the middle of last year, the number of "coloured water" complaints had dropped, from an average of 300 complaints a month at its peak to just above 200 complaints a month currently.

He said the problem would be further curtailed when it complet-ed its second round of flushing by the end of this year.

To reduce incidences of burst pipes, Syabas will replace about 6,000km of old asbestos cement pipes with ductile iron pipes and high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipes. Some 800km of piping has been changed so far.

Syabas supplies treated water to some 7.3 million consumers through more than 1.5 million premise connections.

