

Testing: A Vital Service

By Ric Harry

Provide value
to customers
by evaluating
water quality

Whether you are a sales, installation or service professional, water testing is vital to completing your job. Providing consultation, offering recommendations and addressing problems can only be done after a proper water analysis has been completed.

Testing Parameters

Water testing is not nearly as intimidating as it may seem—test kit manufacturers generally provide easy-to-follow step-by-step instructions. The first step is to determine the testing parameters. This may vary depending on customer needs and expectations, the symptoms expressed by the customer and your preliminary findings.

In most parts of the country, a basic water test includes hardness, iron, manganese, pH and total dissolved solids. The outcome of this test often leads to testing for other contaminants. In some areas, a basic test also may include nitrates, arsenic and more.

If there is color or odor in the water, the cause must be identified through testing. In rural applications, a bacteria test performed by an accredited authority is needed. Consult your local or state industry association to determine what is recommended in your area.

Benefits of Testing

Salespeople often use water testing as a sales strategy, but testing, analyses and site inspections are essential to providing a professional, value-added service to customers. Salespeople need to know what is in a customer's water in order to identify any problems that may exist. With this knowledge, they can speak factually about the benefits of a treatment system, provide a proper assessment, assure best practices, recommend the best solution for the application and size equipment properly.

Some installers feel that water testing is the function of salespeople, but because water conditions and

usage can change, affecting regeneration frequency setup, it can benefit them as well. Additionally, issues not discovered during initial testing, such as iron or manganese, may be revealed once pipe is cut. This new information may impact equipment setup or indicate different or additional treatment. These new facts also could impact the recommended frequency of filter changes, ultraviolet sleeve cleaning, softener bed cleaning and more.

Service professionals test water to evaluate equipment functionality. This can aid in identifying the cause of a failure and how to resolve it. These findings may provide indications as to how often future service may be required and possible changes to current equipment settings.

Customers want to know whether their symptoms are caused by their water quality, and see evidence justifying or explaining a solution.

Proper Sampling

Ideally, draw samples from as close to the water source as possible, particularly for new applications—the bottom of a pressure tank, a laundry tub or the tap closest to the supply. This helps ensure the sample consists of raw water that has not been contaminated in the plumbing or water lines. Furthermore, the sample should be from the cold water feed line prior to any filtration, as filters will impact testing results.

For service, however, it is important to test before and after each treatment point to confirm the functionality of each filter component to determine what needs servicing or replacement. For example, if a system includes a turbidity filter and a taste and odor filter, it is important that the turbidity filter is working properly to prevent the taste and odor filter from failing prematurely. Additionally, there may be an issue downstream, but immediately after the equipment the water test may be good, which suggests the problem is pre-existing in the lines

or the hot water tank and not in the treatment equipment.

Test Kit Care

Be sure to read the instructions in the test kit and on each of the bottles, watching for reagent expiration dates. The popular dropper-type test kits used in the field should be kept in cool environments, as extreme heat or cold can reduce the life and accuracy of reagents. Be careful not to cross contaminate one reagent with another, as that too will impact test results.

Skills Development

The key to delivering this vital service is possessing the knowledge and experience to capably test water. The development of these skills is obtained through training and practical experience. Reading the detailed instructions of test kits is a great start. Customers expect professionalism supported by proof. This assures legitimacy in the industry, so be sure to provide clear and substantiated recommendations. When in doubt, call your state association or test kit manufacturer or supplier for assistance.

Value Though Service

Water testing is a value-added service that aids salespeople in their sales process, installers in their installation process, service people in their servicing process and customers in understanding their symptoms and making informed decisions to receive the best solutions. Increasing sales, improving applications, reducing risk and increasing profitability start with testing the water. *wqp*

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