

Taste and Odour Panel

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water are now using members of the public to judge the taste and smell of its tap water as an additional check on the quality of its domestic supplies.

This testing, as well as other sample analysis, is carried out at independent laboratories which are part of the Severn Trent Services Group. They carry out the full range of chemical, bacteriological and algal analysis on tap water samples in line with the regulatory requirements, which are checked and audited by the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

Water tasting panels are made up of local residents who sip and sniff random samples of water taken from homes throughout those parts of Wales, Herefordshire and Cheshire served by the Company. Each panel consists of local people who replied to advertisements in nearby shops or job centres. A team of six work out of the laboratories covering South Wales whilst another panel are based at the laboratories covering samples taken from homes in North Wales.

All panellists have to be non smokers and agree to abstain from using perfume and perfumed comestics on test days to keep their palates and nostrils in perfect working order. They also have to undergo taste and smell tests and training to ensure the panel works effectively. They are paid by the hour but will only work in short stints as taste and odour fatigue sets in after that. It is expected that they will categorise about ten samples during a session.

The tests themselves are very similar to wine tasting. The water is warmed to encourage an aroma and after the smell is recorded the panellists take a sip of water, swill it around the mouth and spit it out. A set number of beakers are presented at one time which will include blank samples with no taste or odour.

The strength of any taste or smell will be judged by repeating the test using dilutions of the sample. If any sample fails an exceptional report is sent to the Company so that remedial measures can be taken if necessary. The taste and odour panel backs up the results determined by the scientific tests.