POISON IN THE WELL

Crestwood officials cut corners and supplied residents with tainted water for 2 decades.

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STAFF REPORTER

Like every town across the nation, south suburban Crestwood tracks a notice into utility bills that some summer residents are drinking water is safe. Village leaders also trumpet the claim in their monthly newsletter, while boasting they offer the cheapest water rates in Cook County.

But those pronouncements hide a troubling reality: For more than two decades, the town's water supply was so laden with toxic chemicals linked to cancer and other health problems, a newspaper investigation found.

At village offices were holding a national reputation for pleasing parents, and sending out fliers proclaiming Crestwood water was "Good to taste but not to waste!”, state and village records obtained by the newspaper show they recently were drawing water from a contaminated well, apparently to save money.

Officials kept using the well even though state environmental officials told them at least 22 years ago that dangerous chemicals related to a dry-cleaning solvent had seeped into the water, records show.

The village avoided scrutiny by telling state regulators in 1986 that they would get all of their tap water from Lake Michigan, and would use the well only in an emergency. But records show Crestwood kept drawing well water on a routine basis—ranging from 1 to 20 percent of the village's water supply—some months.

The well wasn't shut off for good until December 2007, after the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency tested the water for the first time in more than 20 years.