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**West Virginians start fund for emergency clean water**  
*Toxic well water creating deadly health problems in mining communities*

PRENTER, W.VA. – Worried that slow government response to their pleas for clean water is needlessly causing more community-wide illness, residents of Prenter, W.Va., have organized the Prenter Water Fund. They are encouraging all West Virginians to donate to the fund.

The fund will allow community residents to truck in emergency clean water to the community, where well water has become too toxic to touch. The emergency water could help save lives until the Boone County Public Service District (PSD) brings a water line to Prenter. Phase One of the water line project is supposed to begin within one year. But, a significant proportion of the community has devastating health effects now, which are sometimes lethal.

The Boone County PSD, Boone County Commission and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection all agree that the water in Prenter is not fit for human consumption.

“Some have stopped their little girls from having a bath because they were getting symptoms of having urinary tract infections as young as 18 months, and as soon as they stopped with baths or took them elsewhere to bathe the UTI problems stopped,” Prenter resident Maria Lambert said. “We had a friend in Laurel Creek pass away recently after a short bout with cancer and a couple more diagnosed just in the past few weeks. We never know who will be next.”

Residents suspect that blasting at nearby strip mines has changed groundwater chemistry and flow, causing injected toxic coal slurry waste to contaminate the wells. To “dispose” of slurry, a multi-billion-gallon byproduct of washing coal for market, coal companies either inject it into abandoned underground mines or impound it behind very large earthen dams. Residents noticed their water going bad as early as 2003.

“This coincides with the periods of heavy blasting and similar accounts of other people in the community,” said Bobby Mitchell, who has spent extensive time gathering information on Prenter's water problems. “They spoke of their water not flowing for days at a time. Then, when the flow would come back, it would be degraded or running red or black.”

“The tragedy in Prenter and other Appalachian communities is that folks had good water, then over a period of time their water gradually degraded to the point where it is obviously not fit for bathing, much less drinking and cooking,” said Dr. Benjamin M. Stout, III, biology professor at Wheeling Jesuit University who has tested well water in Prenter. “During that period of degradation, from good to obviously unfit, they have been unknowingly exposed to high levels of metals that have well-known human health consequences.”

Stout has tested ten wells out of an approximate 250 households. Tests indicate levels of antimony, lead, iron, manganese, barium, beryllium, aluminum and hydrogen sulfide gas, among other toxins, that

far exceed safe drinking water standards. Arsenic and lead are the top two substances on the American Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's list of priority pollutants, and hair tests of local residents show astronomical numbers. Some homes have such a high concentration of hydrogen sulfide that electrical outlets need to be replaced every two years due to corrosion.

Cancers, gallbladder disease, kidney failure and corroding teeth are a fraction of the problems found in Prenter.

"Ninety-eight percent of the people I've seen on Prenter Road have gallbladder disease; children's teeth are dissolving," said Pam Johnson, R.N., who is doing a health survey of area residents. "Before I went down there I thought that people were exaggerating their problems, but when I got there, I realized that they were underreporting their health problems. There's a five-year-old with a full set of dentures."

"If you can stop them from drinking the water," Johnson said, "you can stop people from getting worse."

To cover start up costs, the Prenter Water Fund secured a donation from the Vivian and Paul Olum Charitable Foundation. The fund bought 150 55-gallon barrels and hand pumps, as well as a tank to haul the water. A local resident has been hired to drive the delivery truck. A total of \$15,000 will cover the operating costs of the emergency water project for one year.

*To make a tax-deductible donation to the Water Fund, visit [www.prenterwaterfund.org](http://www.prenterwaterfund.org), send to Prenter Water Fund c/o Coal River Mountain Watch, P.O. Box 651, Whitesville, WV 25209 or call Mat or Glen at 304-854-1937. The project is a collaborative effort of residents of Prenter and Coal River Mountain Watch. All donations designated for the Prenter Water Project go toward getting and delivering water.*

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