

Simmons 12/9/99



DAVE HANSFORD

Max Wutzler, 4, of Makara Beach drinks home water safely; his parents have installed an ozone purifier

## Study highlights roof-water risk

HEALTH authorities have expressed concern about the risks of drinking roof water after a survey finding that only 18 per cent of roof water supplies in Wellington region met health standards.

In the survey, one in three such supplies failed municipal standards (requiring no faecal coliform contamination) "badly", with evidence of faecal contamination from birds, rats, cats or possums.

Just under half had been found to be environmentally contaminated, from rotting vegetation and the like.

Though data on the source of notifiable diseases is not broken down to roof water supplies, medical reports have identified giardia, cryptosporidium, salmonella and other sicknesses directly attributable to contaminated roof water.

The shock finding is from research by Massey University's microbiological water research laboratory in Wellington.

Senior microbiologist Stan Abbott and masters' student Vladislav Sedouch have so far taken about 160 samples from a wide geographical area, including Makara, Horokiwi, Normandale, Wairarapa, Waipukurau, Ohakune and the Marlborough Sounds.

Part of the work involved looking at possible contributing physical factors such as temperature, guttering and roofing, paint and cross-plumbing connections, Mr Abbott said yesterday.

The study, though not investigating disease, had measured worryingly high coliform and e-coli bacterial counts.

An Auckland study of its region's water supplies published this year has identified cases

where owners of unclear systems have come down with cryptosporidium and salmonella.

Auckland medical officer of health Greg Simmons said his research had found that nearly 80 per cent of sampled sites exceeded one faecal coliform per 100 millilitres of water — as distinct from the Wellington study which identified sites with any contamination at all.

The high Auckland figure had come in spite of poor measurement accuracy for giardia, Dr Simmons said. "In one of the houses, the people had been very sick for months."

His study had also identified the presence in 18 per cent of the sites of the little-known seromonas bacteria, an "emerging" germ that triggered gastroenteritis symptoms, notably diarrhoea in young children.