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Tacony Creek to run red for tests

By Zoe Tillman

Inquirer Staff Writer

The water flowing through the Juniata Golf Course in Northeast Philadelphia will run red next week. And will likely smell, too.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the Philadelphia Water Department and the U.S. Geological Survey will test the water quality on a stretch of the Tacony Creek between Roosevelt Boulevard and Castor Avenue by releasing red dye into the stream and using a small amount of propane.

Neither substance is harmful to humans, aquatic life, or the environment, said Lance Butler, a scientist with the Water Department.

The dye will track water flow and the propane will be used to study oxygen levels flowing in and out of the water, officials said.

A small team of scientists from the USGS will begin the tests around 6:30 a.m. Tuesday. If there is rain, the tests will be rescheduled.

Butler said the tests were the first of their kind in Philadelphia. The city, in partnership with the USGS, installed water-quality probes along the creek last summer. These tests will add to the data the probes are collecting.

"We want to see what's coming into the city and what's leaving the city," he said.

The tests will cost about \$130,000; the Water Department will pay around \$100,000 and the USGS will cover the rest, according to USGS officials.

The creek runs about 30 miles, starting in Cheltenham, where it's called Tookany Creek, and emptying into the Delaware River near the Betsy Ross Bridge. At that point, it's called

Frankford Creek.

Using colored dye is standard procedure in water-quality tests, said Sarah Robb Grieco, executive director of the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership.

Most of the water to be tested flows through the Juniata Golf Course. A sign warning golfers about the testing has been posted on a message board in the lobby, said Paul Hicks, course assistant manager.

Hicks said he didn't think the golfers - about 120 daily regulars from the neighborhood - would mind if the creek changed color for a few days.


"We've had worse things on the course," he said.

Still, he added, "I'm sure there'll be some questions that day."

Contact staff writer Zoe Tillman at 215-854-2917 or ztillman@phillynews.com.

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