

City well shows high levels of arsenic

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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CLYMER

Clymer: Cause for concern but well was unused last year.

A higher-than-acceptable level of arsenic has been detected in a city well at 16th Street and Avenue G.

However city administrator Bruce Clymer said the well has not pumped water into the public system for more than a year because it's used as a backup well to the city's three other wells.

The discovery, from well samples sent to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for testing five times over the last year, is not cause for alarm, Clymer said.

City officials received a letter from DHHS about the violation last Friday.

"It's not like e-coli (a bacteria) in the water which would pose an immediate health risk," he said Tuesday morning. "This violation does not require boiling, freezing or letting water stand which the DHHS says may make the arsenic more concentrated."

Andy Kahle, a DHHS drinking water program specialist, said Gothenburg citizens don't have to stop drinking city water because of the violation.

Like Clymer, Kahle said it's not something that poses an acute risk and that the only risk from the arsenic level is many years of exposure to the contaminant.

If people are concerned, he suggested that they contact their physician.

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Clymer said the 16th Street well has pumped water down the street during the past year but it didn't go into the city's drinking supply.

The main well, he said, is where the water tower is located on 22nd Street. Clymer said another well used to pump city water is at 20th Street and Avenue A and is a direct line to the water tower.

During the summer when the water usage is high, the well south of the railroad tracks along Cottonwood Drive is opened to improve water pressure on the south side of town.

"I think these wells fit our system better," Clymer said noting that the 16th Street well would only be used if another well became incapacitated.

According to the letter city officials received from DHHS, the state's maximum contaminant level for arsenic is .010 milligrams per liter of water. The average level found in the 16th Street well, based on samples from August 2009 until April 2010, was .012.

City council members were expected to decide what to do about the well at their meeting Tuesday night where the city engineer presented options.

Water customers will receive a letter about the higher-than-acceptable level of arsenic which DHHS officials describe as a metal that occurs naturally in the environment and may occur as a by-product of some agricultural and industrial activities.

When violations occur, city officials must notify the public within 30 days of receipt of the violation letter.

"I am anticipating that the city council will provide direction to not use this well until such time as

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the well either is able to come into compliance or possibly be abandoned,” Clymer said.

For more information, Clymer can be contacted at 537-3668.

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