

Officials look into faulty sirens

Written by Elizabeth Barrett


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WELL WITH VIOLATIONS WON'T BE USED

The city well at 18th Street and Avenue G will be removed from service as council members and city officials evaluate other alternatives.

City officials recently received a letter from the Department of Health and Human Services that the well had a higher-than-acceptable level of arsenic. Arsenic is a metal said to occur naturally in the environment that can pose health risks in higher levels over years of exposure.

Chris Beede of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers of Kearney with experience in community water issues, told the council June 1 it could take the well out of service and notify the DHS if there is an emergency and the well is needed.



MILLER

Another option, such as blending it with other drinking water that would add a line to another well, could cost up to \$1 million, Miller said. Some communities have built treatment facilities and spent \$750,000 to \$1 million.

The city's primary wells are under the water tower and at 20th and Avenue A. Another, on south Cottonwood Drive, is used during summer because of increased water demand.

Public works director Shane Gruber said the well hadn't been used for drinking water since 2006.

Both Gruber and Miller pointed out that several communities have had drinking water violations since the Environment Protection Agency lowered the threshold for acceptable arsenic levels in drinking water from 50 to 10 parts per billion.

Samples from the 18th Street well showed an average arsenic level of 12 parts per billion the past year.

Two of three signals failed during tornado warning.

Because only one of three sirens blared during a tornado warning the night of May 24, city officials are trying to rectify the problem.

During the height of tornado season, no-blow sirens are not a good thing.

During open forum at the June 1 meeting of the Gothenburg City Council, city administrator Bruce Clymer said malfunctioning sirens has been an ongoing issue.

Clymer told the council the city replaced vintage World War II sirens with direct current-powered ones several years ago.

“The thought was that if the power went out, the sirens could still blow,” he said.

Although batteries are replaced each year, Clymer said problems continue even though the city electrical crew and Platte Valley Communications employees have looked at the sirens.

A specialist from West Point, who works on federal signal sirens, will examine the sirens which are likely to be converted to alternating-current power with battery backup.

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With a ballpark price of \$4,800 to convert each siren, Clymer said officials are studying how to best convert them.

Unfortunately, he said it will take five to six weeks for conversion parts to arrive.

In the meantime, sirens will be checked every couple of days and batteries recharged if needed.

Clymer noted that the siren by the water tower is the only one that successfully sounded.

One siren is located at the fire station while the third is by the Nebraska State Department of Roads building on south Highway 47.

On a related matter, he said city officials met last Thursday with police, the fire department and dispatch in North Platte about procedures when a tornado warning is issued.

Since the National Weather Service office in Hastings issues severe weather warnings for Dawson County, Clymer said storms are often already through Gothenburg—past the Lincoln-Dawson County line—when warnings are issued.

“We worked out some things that needed to be explained,” he said.

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