

Arsenic Abatement not in effect at Desert Hills Water

New River's Sabrosa Water Co. is also out of compliance

by Kathleen Stinson

CAVE CREEK - Desert Hills Water Co., now owned by the Town of Cave Creek, has not yet implemented an arsenic abatement program to meet federal standards.

According to the arsenic implementation policy of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, all public ground-water systems basically have until the end of 2007 to come into compliance. That deadline can vary, however, depending on the start date of an individual system's monitoring cycle.

Desert Hills Water was required to start submitting quarterly samples for arsenic testing Dec. 31, 2006. The state will average the year's (four) samples to measure whether the company meets the federal standard, according to Cortland Coleman, ADEQ spokesman.

Desert Hills has two points of water entry into its system, and one does not meet the federal standard for arsenic, according to county Drinking Water program manager John Kolman. He explained that an entry point is reached after the water leaves the well and is pumped out into the distribution system.

DHW Point 1 measures 8 parts per billion for arsenic, while Point 2 measures 18 ppb. The maximum allowed under federally mandated standards is 10 ppb.

The arsenic standards, issued by the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the Safe Drinking Water Act, went into effect Jan. 23, 2006.

Pam Massat, a Desert Hills resident and former chairwoman of the Black Canyon City Water

District, served on the BCC board during the years the district worked to implement a system to lower arsenic levels to meet the new EPA rule. Black Canyon City at that time tested 13 ppb for arsenic.

Massat says the district was able to ~~blend different wells or entry points and only had to build one~~ [three] arsenic treatment plant[s] at a cost in 2005 of \$445,000, not including annual maintenance costs. The system was completed prior to January 2006.

The Black Canyon water district started planning abatement action back in 2002 when the state first brought excessive arsenic levels to its attention, Massat related.

Massat moved to Desert Hills about two years ago and says at the time she contacted the Arizona Corporation Commission to inquire about the condition of Desert Hills Water Co., since she was about to become a customer.

I was told it was an up-and-coming company, and that was six to eight months before (it became known) they had these gigantic problems," Massat said.

Desert Hills Water customer Mike Gilson said, "I don't know if they (Town of Cave Creek) really knew what they were getting into when they bought the company."

In seeking an answer to Gilson's implied question, *The Desert Advocate* attempted to contact Cave Creek town manager Usama Abujbarah but those calls were not returned by press time.

Kolman, the county's drinking water manager said he could not tell which point of entry in the DHW system relates to particular locations of service, when

asked which customers get water from Entry Point 2.

Maricopa County has a number of public systems that still need to come into compliance, Kolman noted. The county, however, is not now doing any monitoring of these systems.

Arizona American Water spokesman Todd Walker says Anthem's system is in compliance with the federal arsenic standard. Cave Creek Water Co. is also in compliance, according to parent company Global Water Resources spokesman Paul Walker. And Carefree Water Co., states a spokesperson, has complied with the new standard.

Sabrosa Water Co. in New River, operated by Global at the direction of the corporation commission, is not in compliance, Paul Walker said. The system tested 33 ppb for arsenic. Sabrosa was previously operated by Arizona American, also at the behest of the commission, after its owner abandoned the utility.

A settlement agreement reached late last year in a county enforcement action requires Cave Creek to make improvements in the Desert Hills system. The agreement includes finding additional sources of water. As part of its purchase agreement to acquire the water company, the town assumed all obligations and liabilities arising out of DHW's operation.

A county report on the status of the town's efforts to comply with the agreement was not available by press time.

Reach the reporter at kathleen@thedesertadvocate.com.

Strike throughs indicate inaccuracy and possible misquotes. RRM