

Bridger Valley water treatment operation keeps water clean

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The Bridger Valley water treatment plant continues to produce quality water for Valley residents without any hints of problems, according to Rocky Irick, systems manager of the plant, Monday morning.

The valley-wide water system has been providing water since its construction in the mid 1980's.

"The system does not put out brown water, and there was not any indication this year of a possibility of a boil threat," Irick said.

Irick, manager of the treatment plant for 15 years, said he wanted to clarify information, which appeared in the June 25 issue of the Pioneer. He felt the article indicated the treatment plant faces problems every spring due to the spring runoff. This isn't true, Irick said.

Water at the plant is tested every four hours so the water can be maintained at healthy levels. He explained, at 11 with a color test, color in the water is visible. He said most water treatment plants keep their water at a one when tested, but when the water in the Valley system hits one or two, the operators are "finding out what is causing this level." He said the Valley has very clean water compared to most other systems. A .35 NTU level is in violation because of contaminants in the water. This year a .10 was the plant's highest reading.

Plant operators preset the sensors. The preset sensors control the meters, which governs the flow of water and the amount of chemicals that are used in the plant to treating the water.

"The shut down of the water treatment plant in 2008 was due to two mechanical breakdowns," Irick said.

In 2008 problems on the first day were caused when a seal in the sand pump went out, but the plant was kept running as the water was still safe. The problem on the second day was a result of debris (moss, sticks, etc.) entering the plant and "wrapping around the sensors of the flow meter on the intake line" Irick said.

As the flow meter "was blinded," it could not accurately access the amount of water going into the plant, so the meters allowed more water into the plant. At that point and because the sensors were not reading the actual inflow, the water was being under-treated.

"That's the reason I wouldn't let the water go into the tank," Irick said.

The under-treated water in 2008 was diverted from flowing into the storage tank to waste water so the levels in the tank continued to go down. As the tank level dropped, the pressure in the pipelines went down, dropping to zero pressure. At zero pressure, theoretically, ground water can seep into the pipes and contaminate the treated water. If there is zero pressure anywhere in the system, Irick said, EPA regulations require a boil order.