

EPA to issue water well results

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency conducted initial testing of some 40 drinking water wells in the Pavillion area in response to citizens' concerns about possible contamination from surrounding oil and gas development.

The tests indicated some "tentatively identified compounds" in a handful of wells, prompting plans for a second round of testing.

The EPA will issue its initial report at a public meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Pavillion Recreation Center.

"If you have water that you fear is impacted, it's hard to find out what's in that water. The folks I know having problems with water, they don't have any means to pay for (testing)," said Deb Thomas, community organizer for the Powder River Basin Resource Council.

Several residents in the Pavillion area have been frustrated at the lack of information regarding their water quality and potential sources of suspected contamination. This sparsely populated area is a mix of agricultural operations and oil and gas development.

More than two dozen production pits are known to have soil contamination from historic oil and gas operations that have been dug out. EnCana Oil and Gas USA acquired the field several years ago and enrolled 28 "pit" sites in the area into the state's voluntary remediation program.

However, it's never been demonstrated that oil and gas activity is the cause of suspected drinking water contamination in the area.

"There is no evidence to connect any of the constituents of interest in the EPA testing to any of our activities," EnCana spokesman Randy Teeuwen said.

Thomas said she and others hope further testing and analysis by EPA will help determine actual water quality and, if there is contamination, the origin.

"We're trying to make sure folks have good water and we're very thankful EPA has come in to do some testing," Thomas said.

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GETTING HELP WITH WATER

When rural residents begin to notice changes in their drinking water, it can mark the beginning of a time-consuming, expensive and emotional investigation into figuring out what's going on.

Your local conservation district can be a good starting point in asking for help. Here are some other good resources:

Energy Minerals Counties Coalition, <http://cbmcc.org>, 307-751-4657

State Engineer's Office, <http://seo.state.wy.us>, 307-777-7354

Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, <http://deq.state.wy.us>, 307-777-7937

Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, <http://wogcc.state.wy.us>, 307-234-7147