

## **Filters have become radioactive**

*Build-up of radium slows replacement, mandates special disposal methods*

By MICHAEL FARRELL, Herald Writer

The city of Morris is in the final stages of removing the filter medium from the three cells at the water treatment plant in Goold Park.

Once the old filters, which take naturally occurring radium from the water, are removed, new filters can be installed and the plant can resume operation.

Last May, the city was in line for a \$400,000 state grant, which would have allowed the city to add a cell to the existing treatment plant and replace the filter medium in the three cells.

However, the grant was one of many across the state Governor Rod Blagojevich vetoed in order to get funding for his healthcare plan.

Mayor Richard Kopczick said the city did receive a grant to replace the filters. However, removing and disposing of the old filters proved to be a difficult job.

Because the filters have been removing low-level radioactive radium from the city's water for more than 16 years, they have become slightly radioactive.

"When we went to remove them, we learned they were considered low-level radioactive waste and it would have cost \$100,000 for disposal," he said.

The mayor said Kevin Murphy and the water department have come up with a method to remove the radioactive particles from the filters and solidify them in concrete.

The Environmental Protection Agency has given the city permission to dispose of the waste in an Allied landfill near Dixon.

Once that is complete, the old filters will be removed, the entire system inspected and the new filters installed.

"We were cutting edge," the mayor said. "Morris was one of the first cities in the nation to have a plant to remove radium from the water. We are developing a process which other cities will be able to use when they have the same problem and without having to spend \$100,000 per unit."

The plant was built by 'D' Construction in 1990 and began operation in early 1991.

Because the process used to remove radium is similar to a water softener, residents in Morris have received water that is much softer than it was prior to 1991.

However, a typical household water softener will not remove radium from the water. The safe level of radium in drinking water has been disputed for many years.

When the Morris plant was constructed in 1990, the EPA had set a maximum level of five picocuries (a very small amount of radiation) and Morris water was at about 10 picocuries.

After the Morris plant was completed, the EPA raised the level above 10 picocuries.

This resulted in newsman Geraldo Rivera coming to Morris in October 1992 because it was a community that had made a \$900,000 investment, which at that point was no longer required.

However, the amount of radioactive radium that can safely be allowed in drinking water remains a matter of dispute.

It is common for water from deep wells to contain small amounts of radioactive radium.

Some communities had tried to dilute it by mixing lake or river water with the well water.