

Missile site still contaminating Belvoir water

By Michelle Dynes

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CHEYENNE -- The leftovers from a Cold War-era missile site continue to contaminate the Belvoir Ranch.

The industrial solvent trichloroethylene was removed oil from metal machinery when a portion of the ranch served as a nuclear missile launch site from 1960 to 1964. And decades later, the substance remains soaked into the ground at a concentration that is eight times the safe level.

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and the Cheyenne Board of Public Utilities hosted a public meeting on the groundwater contamination and the clean up Tuesday at the Laramie County Library.

The public also will be asked to help choose a clean-up method once the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completes a feasibility study in June, said Jane Francis, geological supervisor with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality. But whatever the choice, the process will be lengthy and expensive. Sites at F.E. Warren plagued with a similar contamination problem are estimated to be clear after more than 100 years.

“(Trichloroethylene) bleeds out slowly,” she said. “It’s very persistent.”

The city’s water treatment process removes the industrial solvent before it reaches faucets, but there are concerns that the contamination could spread. Drinking contaminated water also raises the potential for liver damage and cancer.

Francis said trichloroethylene is one of the most common contaminants, but it’s typically found at industrial sites, not within rural areas.

The curving landscape of the Belvoir ranch also helped the substance spread. The lot around a former factory keeps contamination contained, said Bud Spillman, BOPU water treatment manager. The undeveloped prairie doesn’t offer the same restraints.

But at this point, no one knows the full extent of the contamination. All anyone knows is that the substance threatens the safety of water pulled out of the aquifer below.

“The Belvoir is (city residents’) future water supply,” Spillman said.

Cheyenne resident Louise Waters said trichloroethylene also impacts future recreation development on the Belvoir. She added that it doesn’t make sense to pump water off-site for treatment only to return it to the property for use by hikers and campers.