

Sewer discharges exceed safety standards, agency says

## DEQ cites towns for pollution

By MEAD GRUVER - Associated Press writer | Posted: Tuesday, January 5, 2010 12:00 am

CHEYENNE -- The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality has issued violation notices against four towns for repeatedly exceeding pollution discharge limits at their sewage treatment facilities.

Fecal coliform bacteria have been a problem in the past year at all four towns -- Greybull, Pavillion, Cokeville and Riverside. Fecal coliform are a group of bacteria that can cause health problems when they contaminate a water supply.

The water discharged by the towns' sewage lagoons has contained high levels of solid material and high levels of biochemical oxygen demand, a chemical signature that can indicate the presence of bacteria.

The violation notices, issued Dec. 3, resulted from a database query that tallied the number of times communities reported exceeding sewage pollution standards, said Brian Lovett, inspection and compliance supervisor for the department.

"Usually with the municipalities, most of them know they have issues," Lovett said Monday. "The enforcement action is a wake-up call of sorts."

In Cokeville, however, Mayor Stanley Thompson Jr. said his town's violation notice is perplexing because Cokeville has a new sewage treatment facility that corrected the problems. The facility became operational in October.

"Our lagoon was down, and they've worked with us. We knew we had to build one, so we were kind of wondering what the deal was," Thompson said.

Officials in Greybull, Pavillion and Riverside didn't return phone messages seeking comment.

The Greybull plant discharges treated effluent into Big Horn River. The Pavillion plant empties into Ocean Lake, the Cokeville plant into Bear River and the Riverside plant into Encampment River by way of Badger Creek.

The towns had 10 days to appeal the violations to the state Environmental Quality Council but hadn't done so, said the council's executive secretary, Jim Ruby.

Usually the department doesn't fine municipalities for sewage violations, Lovett said.

"Fixing treatment systems is pretty expensive work," he said. "Penalties don't really accomplish a whole lot in a town that's already financially strapped."

Violation notices, in fact, can help towns obtain funding. The notices raise the priority of allocating state funding to improve sewage plants, Lovett said.