

Underground cleanup continues

By Gazette News Services

POWELL - Efforts to clean up groundwater pollution caused by leaking underground fuel-storage tanks in the area continue although progress has been made since work began nearly a decade ago.

"We've got the bulk of the contamination in most of these places contained," said Paul Wollenzien, manager of the Powell project for the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

But work continues at several sites in an effort to bring the groundwater up to EPA drinking water standards, he said. "A lot of these sites are just over the limit."

The project began in the late 1990s with 19 sites where underground contamination "plumes" were found through soil testing. The testing was spurred by complaints from residents who reported gasoline fumes in their homes in several Powell neighborhoods.

Many of the sites were linked to underground storage tanks that already had been removed.

DEQ officials were careful to specify that although plumes were found near some currently operating businesses, they were not linked to practices of those businesses.

Wollenzien said clean up efforts are still under way at five of the 19 original contaminated sites.

Six more are "at rest" but continue soil sampling.

The DEQ supervised installation of clean up systems at the sites. The systems are designed to either remove contaminants through a vacuumlike system or to inject air into the soil, which enables naturally occurring bacteria to remove some contaminants.

The clean up effort is paid for by funds generated by Wyoming's fuel tax.