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Elburn: Radium removal method would save \$9.7M

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ELBURN — Water rates would increase by 64 percent if the village agrees to hire Colorado-based Water Remediation Technology to remove radium from Elburn's water.

Residents pay \$2 per 100 cubic feet of water. Costs to implement WRT's zeolite filtering method would tack on another \$1.11 per 100 cubic feet, officials said.

But, the method would save residents \$9.7 million over 20 years, which is how much more it would cost to implement ion exchange.

Previously, the village agreed on the method to remove its radium.

"The savings here are significant," Village President James Willey said.

Willey made the remarks Monday at a Committee of the Whole meeting where village officials discussed how to remove radium from Elburn water.

Village engineer Bill Gain urged trustees to negotiate a contract with WRT.

"See what you can work out," Gain said.

Radium is a naturally occurring radioactive material found in most deep wells around northern Illinois.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency requires all municipalities to comply with new water quality standards, which include lower radium levels.

Earlier this year, the village reached an agreement with the EPA on a timeline for the village's water to be in compliance with the new regulations.

Elburn agreed to use a method called ion exchange, which would cost roughly \$4.5 million plus another \$500,000 chemical costs to implement.

"The maintenance costs scare me," Trustee Jeff Metcalf said of ion exchange. "I see this as a pit that we will continue to pour money into."

Ion exchange uses the chemicals to send the radium to the village's wastewater treatment plant.

In April, WRT officials contacted the village and said they could remove radium for less money and with simpler technology.

And, the company promised that Elburn's water would taste the same.

WRT's method involves sending water through pipes and filters made of the mineral zeolite. Radium is trapped by the filters because it clings to the zeolite.

The technology reduces radium to less than 5 picocuries per liter, which is the EPA limit.

The village had faced a Dec. 8 deadline to bring its water into compliance. In August, the IEPA announced that it was relaxing its demand.

That was because of the state's 1,800 communities, 123 have water with too much radium. Only 19 of those communities have told the IEPA that they will meet the December deadline.

At least 11 communities said they will not meet the deadline because they do not have enough resources or time to build a treatment plant.

The state wants communities to commit to a radium removal plan. Communities also must declare how long it will take before progress is made.

In exchange, communities with too much radium will not face fines.