

Deadline looms for well decontamination

By *ERIK BROOKS - GM Today Staff*

February 22, 2006

CITY OF PEWAUKEE - The city is poised to spend more than \$1 million to clean up a large radium-contaminated well as it races to beat a Department of Natural Resources December deadline.

The city council voted 4-0 Monday night to enter into an agreement with WRT Environmental LLC to decontaminate its Green Road well, the first of what could be three city wells that will ultimately require costly radium remediation.

The City of Pewaukee will spend just under \$1.1 million over 20 years for the project, costs that will ultimately be recouped through higher customer bills, Department of Public Works Director Jeff Weigel said. The size of the fee increases has yet to be determined.

Radium levels at the Green Road well must be brought to safe levels by December, or the city risks a DNR lawsuit or having to shut down the well altogether until it is cleaned up, City Attorney H. Stanley Riffle said Monday night.

"We don't have any time," he told council members before the vote.

The Green Road well is one of 10 in the city, including two others - at City Hall and the Bluemound Industrial Park - that may require similar cleanup in coming years, Weigel said.

It draws water from a sandstone aquifer located near the Green Road fire station, producing about 77 million gallons of water per year that serves about 3,000 homes and businesses in the eastern half of the city.

The city has had higher-than-acceptable radium levels from the well since it was drilled in the early 1970s, but it has been forced to deal with the issue in recent years due to changes in testing procedures, Weigel said. Radium levels have averaged about 8 picocuries per milliliter above the level of 5 per milliliter considered safe for drinking water.

A city-commissioned engineering report laid out four potential solutions to the radium problem ranging in cost from \$908,000 to \$1.2 million. The option chosen Monday involves absorbing the radium from the contaminated well water, storing it in tanks and eventually having it hauled to a low-level radioactive disposal site in Washington.

It is the second-lowest cost option studied in the engineering report, and a little more expensive than a proposed chemical process that would have ended up with the contaminated water being flushed into the city's sanitary sewer system for treatment.

The absorption option involves little or no manpower because the city would enter into a lease arrangement with WRT Environmental to operate the system.

Also, it does not require sanitary sewer to work. That is important because the area served by the Green Road well does not have sewer service, Weigel said.

Alderman David Mokros said he liked the manpower savings from the absorption plan.

"The payback was very, very short" between the two lowest bids, he said.