

MEMORANDUM

TO: Water Resources Commission

FROM: Barry Norris, Administrator
Technical Services Division

SUBJECT: Agenda Item E, April 12, 2002
Water Resources Commission Meeting

Lakeview Ground Water Briefing

I. Issue Statement

The U. S. Department of Energy (USDOE) has identified contaminated ground water near an inactive uranium-ore processing site immediately north of the Town of Lakeview. USDOE, the Oregon Department of Energy (ODOE), and local governments are developing a plan to restrict the use of ground water in the contaminated area. One approach contemplated in the plan is development of special area well construction rules by the Water Resources Department (Department).

This report is to inform the Commission of federal, state, and local government actions thus far to address ground water contamination in the area and to notify the Commission of rulemaking anticipated by the Department. *This is an informational report only; no Commission action is required.*

II. Background Information

Uranium ore was processed from 1958 to 1974 at a site located immediately north of the town of Lakeview. Attachment 1 provides a USDOE description of the processing site and a brief history of its operation. The milling operation produced tailings containing high levels of contamination. In 1989, USDOE completed a project to remove contaminated materials from the surface of the processing site. However, ground water in the area remains contaminated, and USDOE has determined that water quality below the mill site is unfit for human consumption. Attachment 2 indicates the location of the contaminated ground water based on USDOE data.

The USDOE is working with ODOE and local governments to prevent human consumption of contaminated ground water in the area. To restrict ground water development in the contaminated area, the town of Lakeview and Lake County have adopted ordinances creating restricted ground water use overlay zones. In these zones, all proposed residential, commercial, or industrial development requiring potable water must either connect to the Town's municipal

water system or develop a well in compliance with well construction standards administered by the Department. The Department will develop special area well construction rules that will apply to new wells in the contaminated area (OAR Chapter 690 Division 200).

To mitigate for restricted ground water access, USDOE has provided ODOE with funding to extend the municipal water system from the Town of Lakeview to the area affected by the uranium mill site. A project is currently under construction to provide water to a proposed Department of Corrections facility north of the uranium mill site. Funding from USDOE will be used to expand the capacity of this new water line to serve residents affected by the proposed restrictions.

III. Discussion

The Commission's well construction rules require that contaminated or mineralized water be adequately cased and sealed off to prevent contamination of the overlying or underlying water-bearing zones (OAR 690-210-0100). In a particular aquifer or area, the Commission can also adopt special area standards for the construction and maintenance of wells to ensure the safe development of ground water (OAR 690-200-025). These special area standards may include deeper casing and sealing requirements to prevent comingling of contaminated and uncontaminated aquifers.

Special well construction standards for the area north of Lakeview were anticipated by the Department during the development and adoption of the Goose and Summer Lake Basin Program (OAR 690-513-0030) in 1990:

"Goose Lake Subbasin A

(1) Objectives. The objectives of the Commission in managing the surface and ground water resources of the Goose Lake Subbasin consistent with the provisions of the Goose Lake Compact are to:

(b) Prevent the spread of the contaminated water originating at the uranium mill tailings site near Lakeview through regulation of well construction."

The Department needs more information about the size, contours, and other characteristics of the contaminated aquifer in order to develop special area construction standards. Staff have requested information and recommendations from ODOE. Once we have the information, the Department will formulate administrative rules for special area well construction standards to apply to all new wells and alterations in the contaminated area, including wells for exempt uses. These rules will be reviewed by the Ground Water Advisory Committee (GWAC) prior to presentation to the Commission for adoption. In the meantime, staff will be working with county health officials and other state agencies in notifying the public of potential health concerns.

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IV. Recommendation

This is an informational report. The Commission will be asked to adopt rules at a future meeting.

Attachments:

1. USDOE fact sheet on the uranium processing site
2. Map of the contaminated ground water near the Town of Lakeview

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Groundwater Contamination near the Town of Lakeview

