

WATER EMERGENCY RECAP – JULY 6, 2020

This will give a brief recap of the events leading to our current water emergency. The City's water system began showing signs of not adequately pumping water yesterday evening. City staff immediately deployed and attempted to troubleshoot the situation. When answers were not quickly being found, staff stayed up through the night monitoring the levels at the water storage reservoir and the water tower.

This morning the water system began losing ground on its supply storage levels. Something had to be done. The City was in close contact with KDHE and the Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA). Staff from KRWA has been working with City crews all day today and will be back tomorrow. KDHE stated that the City should attempt to reactive its older wells northwest of town to supplement the supply to keep the water pressure at the water tower. Due to the emergency nature, KDHE advised to connect the older wells to the system and they would do a Do Not Drink Order.

The focus today was to get the water tower levels to a sufficient depth to maintain water pressure. While the Do Not Drink Order is terribly inconvenient, having a total loss of water pressure would be disastrous. If pressure was lost, we would have no use of the water system or the sewer system – that means, among other things, that toilets would not work. At least by keeping the water pressure steady, we can use the existing water for many things, even if it cannot be consumed. So the tough decision was made to follow the KDHE recommendation and add the older wells. The City quickly acquired chlorine equipment to retrofit onto the old wells. Around mid-afternoon, one of the older wells came online and had good chlorine levels. It began pumping into the water system and the water tower levels started to show improvement. The second older well was also readied, but when it was activated, the well blew the main line and is currently being repaired by City crews. Once the second older well is active, we should be able to keep the water pressure at the water tower. This will give us time to figure out what the issues are with our southern wells.

The older wells were deactivated due to high nitrate levels. We do not know the nitrate levels at the moment. One benefit is that this water will be mixing with our regular well water, which will help dissipate some of the nitrate concentrations. Testing will be done in the morning after the water from these wells has circulated through our system. Those tests will be hand-delivered to the lab tomorrow and we will hopefully have results soon.

Questions about health concerns due to nitrate levels should be referred to medical professionals or the Kingman County Health Department. The City does not have information about this as we have been focused on fixing the problem. Likewise, we have no information about pets either. The best suggestion is if it is not good for humans, it is probably not good for animals. Remember, the nitrate levels are unknown until testing is completed, so we do not yet know with certainty if there is a problem or the severity of it. The KDHE order was based upon the history of the older wells.

We have been in contact with the Kingman County Emergency Manager about water supplies that may be needed. Kingman County will consider an emergency declaration at its Commission meeting tomorrow. That will be sent to the Kansas Department of Emergency Management to hopefully get assistance for water distributions if that becomes necessary.

To say that this is a very unusual behavior from our southern wells is an understatement. Tomorrow all efforts will be shifted to figuring out the problem with our regular water source. The current working theories based upon the system data are there is a blockage of the line somewhere or perhaps air pressure has built up in the line. Remember, this line is several miles long that leads into the city, so it could be a major undertaking to find the source of any blockage that may exist.

The City Commission had a special meeting tonight and passed an emergency resolution that is also posted on Facebook and our website. We encourage everyone to conserve water for all purposes so we can maintain our water pressure from the water tower. Please know that City staff is working countless hours to find the problem and to fix it as soon as possible. We appreciate everyone's continued cooperation. As new details become available, it will be posted on our Facebook page and website.