



PRESS RELEASE

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Subject: THE CITY OF HUGHSON REQUIRED TO NOTIFY WATER CUSTOMERS ON ARSENIC LEVELS.

The time has come for the City of Hughson to notify its water customers that the level of naturally occurring arsenic from ground water is higher than the new federal standards. The City will be sending this information out to water customers in response to a determination made by the California Department of Health Services that public notification was now required.

In 2001 the United States Environmental Protection Agency set a new standard for arsenic in drinking water that lowered the accepted level down from 50 parts per billion to 10 parts per billion. At this new level, thousands of water supply systems in the United States which had been below the old standard for many years were now determined to be over the new level. The Federal rule provided for compliance schedules that would require very high levels serving large populations to be dealt with as soon as possible, while systems that were moderately over the standard serving few people would be given more time to remedy the problem. More recently members of congress have proposed to revise the standard including the possible exempting of systems that serve less 10,000 people, though no changes have been made at this point.

In January of 2005 the City of Hughson received a study that showed the city's arsenic concentration at 11 parts per billion on average, just barely above the new federal limit, but never-the-less still above the limit. That same report suggested that it could cost the City upwards of \$7.5 million dollars to install new treatment technology to get this level down into compliance, with additional annual costs of maintaining this treatment that could run into the hundreds of thousands each and every year. The city's consultant also warned then that it was premature to take action just then, as the State had yet to decide on whether it would set its own level, and that the treatment technologies were still in their early stages of development.

Since then, the State Department of Health Services has required further testing to meet a prescribed method of establishing whether the City's system technically falls within the requirements for further action. This has recently been completed and the state now requires the City to issue period notices to its customers about the arsenic levels, and to submit a plan to address the arsenic concentrations.

This was one of several issues I found waiting for attention when I arrived in late 2004, according to David Chase the Public Works Director and City Engineer. It is not easy telling people that it will cost this kind of money on top of what they are paying now because we are now just barely over a new limit, even though it is the same water that it has always been under the old federal level. Especially when we are also trying to cope with very expensive waste water state compliance issues. We have labored hard to try and come up with a solution to this dilemma. Fortunately we are now in a position that we may actually have just that solution.

The City opted into a plan to receive water from the Turlock Irrigation District's planned water treatment plant. Because this uses surface water, it will not have the arsenic concentrations that come from ground water. This water is expected to be available in about three years. That would allow the City to save at least \$7.5 million by not having to install treatment facilities in order to remedy the arsenic levels. A cost that our customers would ultimately have to pay. The new federal rules proposed that systems like Hughson be provided at least five to eight years to remedy arsenic levels above the new standard.