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Chino Valley well pumping arsenic- tainted water to homes

Associated Press
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PRESCOTT - State regulators have warned hundreds of Chino Valley residents not to drink or cook with their tap water after they found arsenic levels more than 30 times the federal limit in a local well.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality sent letters to customers of the private Wilhoit Water Co.-Yavapai Estates warning them that water from the company's well had arsenic levels of 316 parts per billion. The federal threshold for the suspected carcinogen is 10 parts per billion.

Wilhoit serves a subdivision in Chino Valley known as Yavapai Estates and an apartment complex with at least 250 homes and apartments. The well was tested on Oct. 24, and state environmental regulators issued a notice of violation to the company earlier this month. They notified customers on Friday.

The residents were told to immediately switch to bottled water for drinking and cooking but that showering, bathing and washing clothes was not a health hazard.

Wilhoit Water Co. officials refused comment.

The company is one of eight private water suppliers that the Town of Chino Valley plans to buy using a \$6 million low-interest state loan approved in November.

But town officials said the arsenic issue is the water company's responsibility.

"We've pledged our support to ADEQ and the Arizona Corporation Commission (in resolving this matter)," Chino Valley Town Manager Bill Pupo said. "If they need someone to step in, we would run the company as long as we were reimbursed for the costs. It's quite a concern to us."

Chino Valley Mayor Karen Fann said the town is working closely with Yavapai County Emergency Services to help residents get bottled water. The town can't legally step in and help unless the Arizona Corporation Commission names a receiver for the water company.

Chino Valley's water resource director said it would likely cost about \$200,000 to install a treatment system to remove arsenic from the well.

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