



One Year Later – Taking the PCE Out of Drinking Water

By Suzanne Michaels

Tomorrow marks the one year anniversary of the return to service of two of the City's water wells at the corner of Griggs and Walnut Streets... and you are invited to come see



the special "air stripping technology" that makes it possible to restore the wells to service.

Adrienne Widmer, P.E., Regulatory and Environmental Services Administrator, notes, "Over the past year, we've cleaned more

than 181 million gallons of water at this plant, and been able to put that finished, clean water into our distribution system."

During the past year, Las Cruces Utilities provided more than 6.7 billion gallons of water from deep wells in and surrounding the city... water that is pulled up, processed, runs through our system, and is used by Las Cruces residences and businesses.

Tomorrow, Thursday, August 22, everyone is welcome to come, tour the water treatment plant at the Griggs/Walnut facility, ask questions of Utilities Water Resources staff, find out how the process works, and enjoy refreshments from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

It was exactly one year ago that the City, County, State, and EPA cut a large yellow ribbon marking the completion of the construction of the Water Treatment Facility that



uses specialized technology to clear the water of a chemical called perchloroethylene, (commonly known as PCE).

PCE is a man-made substance widely used for dry cleaning fabrics and textiles and for metal degreasing operations. Although the source of the PCE spill was never clearly identified... between 1993 and 1995, regular water testing by Las Cruces Utilities started picking up traces of PCE in water wells in the area.

The wells were taken off line individually as they approached the MCL (maximum contaminant level determined by the EPA), so it is important to know that drinking water was never distributed to citizens with levels that exceeded federal Safe Drinking Water standards.

Over the years, remedial investigations and feasibility studies were completed to determine the best available technology to treat the water. The solution to the problem came from a collaboration between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the City of Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED).

Almost 20 years after PCE was initially detected, construction began in 2011 on the Water Treatment Facility; in 2012 the plant was completed and went to work “airstripping” the water. And now, on the anniversary of the ribbon cutting one year ago, everyone is invited to tour the plant to see how it works.



The cleaned water is blended and distributed throughout the conglomerate of wells and distribution lines that makes it possible for Utilities to provide safe, clean drinking water to almost 100,000 residents.

The cleanup is estimated to take 15 to 20 years, and will cost an estimated \$330,000 per year, for up to 20 years, for operations and maintenance of the treatment system.

Las Cruces Utilities provides GAS – WATER – WASTEWATER – SOLID WASTE services to approximately 100,000 Las Cruces residents. Utilities is not funded through tax dollars; it is a cost-of-service provider. You can reach Las Cruces Utilities at 528-3511 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.