Second Anniversary Celebration at Griggs and Walnut Superfund Site

By Shannon Bianco and Suzanne Michaels

"This facility has cleaned 235 million gallons of water over the past two years and put it into city use," said Water Resources Administrator, Adrienne L. Widmer, P.E., who continued, "The site currently produces approximately 8.5 million gallons of safe drinking water for Las Crucens every month."

Las Cruces Utilities hosted an open house in early September at the Griggs and Walnut Groundwater Plume Superfund Site to celebrate the second successful year of contaminant removal from two city wells. Members of the community toured the facility alongside City officials, sampled water in commemorative cups, and learned about the history of the water treatment plant and production statistics, as well as testing and adjustments made during the year to secure future achievement.

During the past year a geo-hydrologist from John Shomaker and Associates, Inc. (JSAI), began diagnostic testing of the pumps and running through different pumping scenarios to reach peak efficiency in removing the perchloroethylene (PCE) contamination. He discovered running the pump in one of the affected wells for 4 hours then shutting it down for a recovery period produced the optimum operation for pulling PCE out at the goal rate.

A probe was then installed in the well allowing Utilities operators to obtain minute readings, to closely monitor the process.

Las Crucen Bill Daily, who worked in water supply in other communities for several years, noted the water treatment plant is very impressive, “I like the fact that it’s designed not only for today, but can accommodate a higher demand with population growth.”

Through joint cooperation between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the City and County, the Griggs Walnut Groundwater Plume Superfund site was completed and open for operation in 2012.

The site utilizes a unique air-stripping technology to rid the water of the contaminant PCE. Raw water is pumped in from the two wells, treated, and then blasted with oxygen as it snakes its way through 16 air-stripping filters. The PCE compounds stick to the air and are disposed of. The water is tested to make sure the PCE has been eradicated, then blended with water from other wells for distribution throughout the system.

Utilities Director, Dr. Jorge A. Garcia, P.E., said 4 or 5 options were available to correct the contamination and this technology was chosen because of its, “cost effectiveness and energy efficiency.” The project will take approximately 15-20 years to complete and cost about $330,000 a year.

“The facility is operating as designed,” said Widmer, “PCE-contaminated water is being removed from the aquifer, cleaned to a non-detect zero concentration, and being put to beneficial use.”

You can reach Las Cruces Utilities at (575) 528-3500 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Las Cruces Utilities provides GAS – WATER – WASTEWATER – SOLID WASTE services to nearly 100,000 Las Cruces residents.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Photo 1: Las Cruces Utilities recently hosted an open house to celebrate the second anniversary of successful operation and removal of the contaminant PCE at the Griggs and Walnut Superfund Site.

Photo 2: Utilities Director, Dr. Jorge A. Garcia, P.E., Las Cruces Utilities Board Members, other dignitaries and guests sampled the cleaned water straight from the tap at the Griggs and Walnut Water Treatment Facility.

Photo 3: Chairman of the Las Cruces Utilities Board of Commissioners, William Little, fills his commemorative cup with cleaned water from the tap.