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State and Waukesha reach agreement on radium deadline

The City of Waukesha has reached an agreement with the State of Wisconsin that extends the deadline for full compliance with drinking water standards for radium. The agreement was approved tonight by the Waukesha Common Council.

Waukesha had been required to be in full compliance by June 30, 2018 under a 2009 agreement with the state. However, its planned conversion to a radium-compliant Lake Michigan water supply will not be completed until 2023. The new agreement recognizes the city's efforts to implement that new water supply and extends the radium deadline until Sept. 1, 2023.

"Wisconsin and seven other Great Lakes states have unanimously said that a switch to Lake Michigan water is Waukesha's only reasonable way of providing dependable and sustainable drinking water to our families and businesses," Waukesha Mayor Shawn Reilly said. "The amended agreement gives us the time to switch to Great Lakes water. It gives us an additional five years, but we expect to have the new water source in place before then."

The mayor stressed that Waukesha's water is safe to drink in the meantime. "Radium standards are designed to protect people from the risks of drinking a half gallon of water per day for an entire lifetime. Our water already meets the federal standard at almost all times, and is safe to drink while we implement the long-term solution."

Radium occurs naturally in Waukesha's deep aquifer water supply. The water utility has reduced the concentrations of radium by adding radium removal treatments on three of its wells, by adding three new shallow wells, and by blending water from its various wells. Waukesha has



also implemented an aggressive water conservation program, including its ban on daytime lawn sprinkling, to reduce the demand for water from wells that have radium.

The agreement imposes additional obligations on Waukesha to ensure compliance with the radium standards until Lake Michigan water is online. The first requirement is to require Waukesha to have backup equipment for its radium-compliant wells. The increased usage of the radium-compliant wells has shortened the life of well pumps and motors. Obtaining and replacing such equipment can take several months. By having replacement equipment on hand, the replacement time can be reduced and radium compliance can be maintained.

Second, the agreement requires Waukesha to have an additional layer of redundancy if for any reason the schedule for obtaining Lake Michigan water slips beyond September 2023. Under the agreement, Waukesha must undertake the design and planning for a temporary rental treatment system to be installed on Well 6 at a cost of approximately \$400,000. If the Lake Michigan project is not 50% completed by May 1, 2022, Waukesha will need to install the temporary treatment system at a cost of \$3.1 million. The temporary system would not provide a sustainable water supply for Waukesha, but would provide redundant treatment for radium until the Lake Michigan project is completed.

The mayor said he expects the switch to lake water to stay on track, so he does not expect the city to be required to build the additional treatment. “Additional treatment could provide radium-compliant water, but it is not a long-term solution to our water problems,” Reilly said. “The Great Lakes governors, after reviewing our situation under the Great Lakes Compact, agreed that continuing to use deep or shallow groundwater is not environmentally sustainable for our city. Adding additional radium treatment to our groundwater wells would not prevent us from the need to switch to a lake supply, but would only cost us additional money.”

Reilly said he appreciated the willingness of the state to extend the deadline for Waukesha while Waukesha implements the switch to Great Lakes water. “I want to thank the Department of Justice and the Department of Natural Resources for working with us. The amendment to our agreement recognizes the good faith effort Waukesha has made to find a long-term, sustainable solution to our water problems, and the time it takes to implement it.”

The agreement will also require approval by the Waukesha County Circuit Court.

For additional background information on radium, see the radium tab at <http://www.waukesha-water.com/wq.html>.

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