

Tests show signs of bacteria in Athena’s drinking water

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

ATHENA — The city of Athena has issued a warning for residents to boil their drinking water after tests showed signs of coliform bacteria in the city’s system.

“These bacteria will not likely make you sick but can be a concern for people with weakened immune systems,” an announcement from the city said. “As our customers, you have a right to know what happened and what we are doing to correct this situation.”

Kenneth Faircloth, drinking water operator with Athena Public Works, was quick to work Friday morning as the city begins to “aggressively” chlorinate and flush its water system.

Coliform bacteria are organisms that are present in the environment and in the feces of all warm-blooded animals and humans, the city’s announcement said, and are not likely to cause an illness directly. Instead, the presence of coliform bacteria indicates the possibility of other disease-carrying organisms being in the water system.

“If disease-causing bacteria are present, the most common symptoms are gastrointestinal upset and



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Athena Public Works Manager Ken Faircloth flushes a hydrant on Friday as the city worked to clear its water system of coliform bacteria.

general flu-like symptoms such as fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea,” the city’s warning said. “Symptoms are most likely in children or elderly household members.”

The city first issued a warning Thursday night after preliminary tests showed signs of the potentially harmful bacteria in the water. A full test confirmed the contamination on Friday morning. The tests showed no signs of *E. coli*.

According to the city, the contamination is the result of Wildhorse Creek flooding earlier this month. Faircloth said the city regularly tests its water systems twice

a month and the first test after the floods showed no contamination.

Athena’s water system has 500 connections throughout the city, according to Faircloth.

The last test that showed contamination occurred in 2017, Faircloth said, and a cycle of chlorinating and flushing the system removed it within a few days, which they’re hoping will be the case this time around too.

The warning has been posted on the city’s Facebook page, website and locations around the city, but the city asks that people help spread the message to those who may have yet to see it.

Council to vote on new city hall Monday

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Hermiston City Council will vote Monday on whether to build a new city hall or put a \$175,000 insurance payout into fixing damage to the current building from a December fire.

A tour of the current city hall will take place at 6 p.m., followed by a 7 p.m. city council meeting across the street at the Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave.

City Manager Byron Smith is recommending the council vote to build a new city hall on the same site and remodel the basement of the library, for a combined total price of about \$9 million, paid for through payments by Lamb Weston, Amazon and future companies signing a long-term enterprise zone agreement with the city.

The new building would include a 9,200-square-foot main floor, a second story and basement that would be rented out to another agency until the city needed the room to grow. The building department and municipal court would be moved into

the new building from their current locations.

Also on Monday’s agenda is ratification of a utility rate increase. When the city adopted a restructure of the water and sewer rates to take effect in March 2019, the restructure included a provision that rates would automatically be adjusted each March based on inflation, using the Engineering News-Record Construction Cost Index. The index went up 1.8% for the past year, so utility bills will also go up that much, adding an average of \$1.78 per month for customers, according to the city.

On Monday, the council also plans to vote on a request for annexation. MonteVista Homes has submitted an application for the city to annex in 20 acres of property located on the south side of East Punkin Center Road, just east of Northeast Fourth Street. The developer plans to build single-family residential homes on the property, plus a trail and public park.

Monday’s meeting will also include a 20-minute closed-door executive session to discuss negotiation of a property transaction

and to “consider preliminary negotiations involving matters of trade or commerce in which the governing body is in competition with governing bodies in other states or nations.”

The full agenda packet can be found online at hermiston.or.us/meetings.

BRIEFLY

Pendleton man facing child porn charges dies ahead of long-awaited trial date

PENDLETON — A Pendleton man who was facing federal child porn charges died in January before his case could be heard this month and after the trial was delayed six times in the past year and a half.



Newsom

Jason Robert Newsom, 43, died at his home in Pendleton on Jan. 22 from acute myeloid leukemia. He was scheduled to face federal trial on Feb. 11 for three counts of transportation of child pornography and one of possession of child pornography.

The U.S. District Court of Oregon’s case was terminated on Jan. 30 due to Newsom’s death.

Newsom was originally arrested by FBI agents on June 29, 2018, while he was at his Pendleton frozen yogurt business, Yummm, and his trial date was scheduled for September 2018. Court documents show a combination of changes in representation and motions from Newsom’s defense for additional discovery time led to the court granting six continuances that pushed the trial date all the way until February 2020.

Federal court records also show Newsom’s conditional release was modified three times since December 2019 to allow him to see his son. Twice he was allowed to travel and stay overnight in Portland and another time he was able to watch his son play in a basketball tournament in Washington.

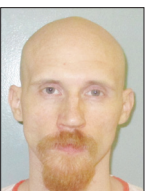
Boardman man charged with child sex crimes

MORROW COUNTY — A two-month investigation led to a Boardman man being arrested Wednesday on 13 charges of first-degree sex crimes.

The Boardman Police Department arrested Chaz Raymond Sewell, 36, at his residence after a Morrow County grand jury secretly indicted him on Tuesday for 11 counts of first-degree sex abuse and two counts of first-degree unlawful sexual penetration.

Boardman Police Chief Rick Stokoe said Detective Kyle Pearcy was the lead investigator on the case.

Sewell was arraigned in Morrow



Sewell

County Circuit Court in Heppner on Thursday and pleaded not guilty to all charges. As Measure 11 crimes, first-degree sex abuse carries a mandatory minimum of six years and three months, while first-degree unlawful sexual penetration carries a mandatory minimum of eight years and four months.

The secret indictment accuses Sewell of committing each of the crimes against a minor between Jan. 1, 2015, and Dec. 22, 2019.

Blue Mountain Defenders will be Sewell’s court appointed representation when he next appears for a pretrial hearing in Heppner on March 5.

Sewell is currently lodged at the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton. His bail is set at \$2,750,000.

DEQ issues emergency order for Eastern Oregon counties

UMATILLA COUNTY — The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality issued an emergency order Friday that suspends a number of regulations and fees associated with debris cleanup for Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties.

According to a press release, the order follows the state of emergency order issued by Gov. Kate Brown in providing assistance to local farmers, ranchers, residents and businesses in the area who have suffered damage to an estimated 300 structures.

The order suspends regulations and fees for residential asbestos project notifications and accumulation of asbestos waste but does not suspend any rules about the safe disposal of asbestos waste.

The order also suspends fees for repairing septic systems in Union and Wallowa counties but not in Umatilla County, the release said. It also suspends fees for establishing temporary solid waste disposal sites.

Humbert Landfill along with the Pendleton and Hermiston transfer stations are local options for solid waste disposal, according to the release, but not asbestos waste disposal.

Finley Buttes Landfill in Morrow County, Columbia Ridge and Chemical Waste Management of the Northwest landfills in Gilliam County and the Walla Walla Landfill are regional options for asbestos waste disposal, the release said.

The temporary order expires June 1 for the asbestos program, and Sept. 1 for solid waste and septic systems.

— EO Media Group

When the community and Red Cross needed help, YOU were there!



Thank you to all the Red Cross Cascades Region volunteers who provided hope, comfort and support to the community in the aftermath of recent flooding.

Our work continues, together.



American Red Cross
Cascades Region



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RESORT & CASINO

2/21-2/23

Cineplex Show Times

\$5 Classic Movie

Showing Wednesday @ 12p

Pork Chop Hill

The Call of the Wild (PG)

12:10p* 2:30p* 4:50p 7:10p 9:30p

Sonic the Hedgehog (PG)

12:00p* 2:20p* 4:40p 7:00p 9:20p

Fantasy Island (PG13)

1:20p* 4:10p 6:40p 9:10p

Downhill (R)

12:00p* 2:10p* 4:20p 6:30p 9:00p

Bad Boys for Life (R)

1:10p* 4:00p 6:50p 9:40p

* Matinee Pricing

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WILDHORSE
RESORT & CASINO

2/24-2/25

Cineplex Show Times

\$5 Classic Movie

Showing Wednesday @ 12p

Pork Chop Hill

The Call of the Wild (PG)

4:50p 7:10p 9:30p

Sonic the Hedgehog (PG)

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