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City, county enter into PFAS monitoring agreement

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José Varela López of La Cieneguilla puts out hay for his cows in March. The water at his home may be contaminated with PFAS, which was identified in some wells in La Cienega.

Luis Sánchez Saturno/New Mexican file photo



County affordable housing program will offer grants up to \$50K for improvements

Though the city of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County have a reputation for butting heads, the two entities made a step toward collaboration with the approval last week of an agreement for PFAS monitoring.

Unanimously approved by the Santa Fe City Council at its May 29 meeting, the memorandum “formalizes the cooperation between the city and county on the emerging contaminant known as



EPA sets tougher limits on cancer-causing chemicals in drinking water

If You Go

What: La Cienega Valley Association PFAS Task Force meeting.

When: 6 p.m. Thursday, June 20.

Where: The La Cienega Valley Association Community Center, 136 Camino San Jose, Santa Fe.

PFAS experts from the New Mexico Environment Department will be at the meeting as well as Santa Fe County staff, who will be present to answer questions about the home repair program.

PFAS,” Public Utilities Department Director John Dupuis said at the meeting.

Dupuis said the goal of the agreement is to ensure the city and county are using funding to address the issue as efficiently as possible and to make sure they are not duplicating each others’ efforts.

“Groundwater is our most resilient resource against drought, and protection against PFAS is essential,” he said.

PFAS — short for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances — are commonly known as “forever chemicals” because they take thousands of years to decompose and last indefinitely in the bloodstream. They have been linked to certain types of cancer and other health conditions.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently placed limits on the amount of the chemicals that can be found in drinking water, and last month the state received about \$19 million in federal infrastructure money to expand efforts to detect PFAS in the water systems of the state’s smaller and disadvantaged communities.

The county announced last fall the chemicals had been discovered in some private wells in the La Cienega and La Cieneguilla communities south of Santa Fe. The source of the contamination is believed to be a former New Mexico National Guard site at the Santa Fe Regional Airport, where foam used in firefighter training might have contaminated the groundwater with PFAS. Some of the PFAS may also be coming from the city’s wastewater treatment plant on Paseo Real, which has been a source of frustration for downstream county residents for years.

Since the discovery, county residents in the affected area have been calling for more research into the scope and direction of the plume and resources to ensure their drinking water is safe. The city and county applied together for a \$459,000 grant which was awarded to the county earlier this year for modeling of the extent of the plume.

This month, the county opened up applications for the Home Rehabilitation and Energy Efficiency Grant Program, an initiative that will award homeowners in unincorporated parts of the county up to \$50,000 in grants to repair their homes and remediate hazards such as PFAS contamination of private wells.

The program has an initial budget of \$1 million and grants will be distributed to low- and moderate-income homeowners on a first-come, first-served basis.

The text of the memorandum of agreement states the city will cooperate with the county and any of its contractors in the characterization of the PFAS plume; permit the county access to the city's wastewater treatment plant and the airport; identify sites for monitoring wells and permit the drilling of such wells if needed; maintain any wells that are drilled on airport or wastewater treatment plant property and will agree to share groundwater data for the two sites that the county "believes is reasonably necessary for the characterization of the plume."

The agreement includes a requirement for the county to share any data it obtains, Dupuis said, which the city will make available as it receives it. The county also has a public page on its website with PFAS information at santafecountynm.gov/public-works/pfas.

Dupuis said at the meeting that sampling of the city's water sources have so far identified "zero occurrences of PFAS in our sources of potable drinking water."

County Commissioner Anna Hansen, who has called for more regulation of the chemicals at the federal level, said she was glad the city approved the agreement.

"We all have to work together on this," she said. "This is a big issue."

Andrea La Cruz-Crawford, president of the La Cienega Valley Association, said the agreement is "excellent news from our perspective."

“What we want to see is collaboration and togetherness as we move forward” to the extent possible, she said.

The association’s PFAS Task Force will hold a second community meeting regarding the PFAS contamination, following a March town hall, later this month. La-Cruz Crawford said the meeting will focus on making sure residents understand how to access the grants.

“We really need to figure out where the PFAS is migrating but right now we’re trying to focus on the immediate needs of our residents,” she said.

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