

http://www.goskagit.com/news/local_news/anacortes-to-begin-lengthy-process-of-cleaning-up-old-water/article_3f035ce0-8411-5f95-a106-fe9f52107117.html

Anacortes to begin lengthy process of cleaning up old water treatment plant

By AARON WEINBERG @Aaron_SVH Apr 25, 2017

ANACORTES — Following the city of Anacortes' revelation Monday that it found low levels of arsenic, lead and PCBs at its old water treatment plant, the city will now go through a lengthy process with the state Department of Ecology to clean up and demolish the site.

The chemicals, found in January 2015, do not pose a public safety risk and have not contaminated the water supply, city officials said.

The city, which is required to clean the site because the levels of those chemicals exceed regulatory standards, is now working toward pursuing a formal agreement with Ecology to provide oversight of the cleanup process.

Ecology spokesman Larry Altose said the city's other option would have been to continue working independently through the process.

Anacortes Mayor Laurie Gere said the city never really considered going the independent route.

"We work a lot with the state Department of Ecology and do everything to the highest of standards with them," Gere said. "It offers a higher level of accountability and transparency."

To start the process, the city provided Ecology with a document Monday called a remedial investigation report, which details the city's findings on the former water treatment plant.

But before Ecology can review the document, the two parties must reach a legal agreement to formalize its working relationship, Altose said.

That process could take weeks or months as lawyers hash out details, he said.

When the legal agreement is reached, Ecology will review the city's 1,400-page report on the chemical findings at the former water treatment plant, which was decommissioned in 2013. The city hired Bellevue firm Stantec Consulting Services to prepare the report.

"We make sure we don't see anything missing," Altose said. "If there is, we will work with the city and their consultant to pull together items that need to be addressed."

If Ecology finds the report complete, a public comment period will open. Ecology will then review all public comments and again decide whether the report is complete. The next steps include determining the best way to clean the site, creating an action plan, then executing the plan.

Altose said it's normal to find those types of chemicals in older buildings. More stringent health standards were put in place in the 1980s.

"At the time this building was constructed, PCBs may have been in paints, caulking and other building materials," he said. "It's not surprising to find those ... It happens quite frequently."

PCBs are a group of man-made organic chemicals and have been associated with negative health affects, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Ecology provides grants for this type of cleanup but Altose said the source of that grant funding — tax from hazardous materials and petroleum products — has dried up recently.

The city is working to provide costs associated with the cleanup and demolition to the Skagit Valley Herald.

It paid about \$20,000 to hire a public relations firm to build a website, among other services. City staff said it could take a couple days to determine how much it cost to test the site. The city hired private companies in the fall and winter of 2016 to perform more thorough testing, City Attorney Darcy Swetnam said.

City council members, when contacted by the Skagit Valley Herald, weighed in on the topic.

Councilman John Archibald said from what he's seen, there are no concerns regarding health.

"The water has always been safe," he said. "I don't have any concern."

In hiring a public relations firm to help reveal the status of the water treatment plant two years after the chemicals were found, Archibald said, "The concern was to make sure that everyone received the correct information ... In today's world, with people going crazy with social media, I think the idea was to get the right information out there."

Councilwoman Erica Pickett said this cleanup process is not about water quality because the city's water has always tested clean.

Councilman Eric Johnson said he'd refer comment to Gere, Public Works Director Fred Buckenmeyer and Swetnam, while council members Brad Adams, Matt Miller, Ryan Walters and Liz Lovelett did not immediately return phone calls.

— Reporter Aaron Weinberg: 360-416-2145, aweinberg@skagitpublishing.com, [Facebook.com/byaaronweinberg](https://www.facebook.com/byaaronweinberg)

Aaron Weinberg