

HB

444

HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

(5)

Date Referred: January 24, 1990

FURTHER REFERRALS:

FINANCE

Date of Committee Action: 3/20/90

The COMMUNITY & REGIONAL AFFAIRS Committee considered:

HB 444

HOUSE BILL NO. 444

APPROP: MCGAHAN UTIL. WATER SYS. UPGRADE

"An Act making a special appropriation for payment as a grant to the Kenai Peninsula Borough for the McGahan Utilities, Inc., water system upgrade; and providing for an effective date."

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- [] be replaced with _____ [] the same title
- [] have attached amendment(s) [] a new title
- [] do pass
- [] do not pass
- [] no recommendation
- individual recommendations
- [] additional referral to the _____ Committee

ADOPTS: _____ letter of intent

ATTACHES NEW FISCAL NOTE(s):
(Dept)

APPROVES PREVIOUS:

(Date/Dept)

- [] fiscal impact _____
- [] zero fiscal note _____
- [] zero with analysis _____

- [] fiscal note(s) _____
- [] zero fiscal note(s) _____
- [] zero fn/analysis _____

SIGNING DO PASS:

Eileen P. Mulvaney

Richard J. [Signature]

SIGNING:
(Check approp. column)

	Do Not Pass	No Rec	Amend
Richard J. [Signature]	✓		
[Signature]			
<i>Chris Davis</i>		✓	
<i>Eugene Kubler</i>		✓	

Eileen P. Mulvaney

 Chairman's Signature

MCGAHAN UTILITIES, INC.
P.O. BOX 8446
NIKISHKA, ALASKA 99635

June 24, 1989

Dennis Kelso, Commissioner
Department of Environmental Conservation
3220 Hospital Drive
Box 0
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Mr. Kelso:

McGahan Utilities, Inc. presently furnishes water to approximately 400 people, plus several businesses which includes two canneries.

October 12, 1988, D.E.C. came out to check our water utility. Although they believed there was contamination in our water at that time, they did not see fit to inform us that there was a problem and they had known there was a problem since August of 1988.

In December, Jane Tonkin from D.E.C. called and set up an appointment with my daughter, to sample our system, at that time we were finally informed there was thought to be contamination in our water. December 28, 1988 D.E.C. pushed the panic button by running headlines in the local newspapers, over the radio and even on CNN News. This resulted in a panic in the community which caused a lot of problems; loss of home sales, loss of renters and some people quit paying their water bills.

The local D.E.C. said they feel they have found the source of contamination which is near the fire station and service station where a laundry used to be located, approximately 600 ft. from our wells. This contamination would have happened in August of 1977, at which time D.E.C. wrote up the owner of the laundry, Duane Johnson. We were never informed of the possible contamination to our wells. Although Mr. Johnson closed his business due to contamination and his dealings with the State over this, **WE WERE NOT INFORMED OF THE CONTAMINATION.** I believed he had closed his business due to the fact I had informed him that he must bring his water account current or move, as he was buying water from McGahan Utilities at that time, Now, 12 years later, I find he closed his business due to contamination found by D.E.C.

D.E.C. has known since August of 1977 there was contamination in the soil near my wells, and yet they have done nothing whatsoever to clean it up. I am requesting that D.E.C. take responsibility for their past actions, or lack of action, and clean up the contamination.

D.E.C. made us shut down one of our wells and we need both wells to be certain there is enough water supply for the residents, businesses and the two canneries to operate. Due to D.E.C. finding this contamination in our water system, it appears that it will no longer be feasible for McGahan Utilities to continue operation without financial assistance. We should not have to pay for D.E.C's mistakes in allowing a contaminate to remain in the soil and therefore destroying our water system.

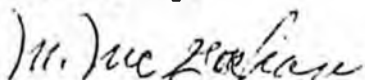
We will need financial assistance, if this water system is to continue to operate and serve the people and businesses of this community. McGahan Utilities, Inc. does not have sufficient funds to drill another well, which is desperately needed to serve the community, it's businesses and canneries.

We need the canneries in this area, as they provide jobs for many of the local people and their families. If the canneries must close down due to lack of water it will affect the entire community.

The State is spending millions in Valdez, on seals and seagulls. I would like to think they would put as much value on human lives as well.

The State's lack of responsibility is the cause of this hardship and we are requesting that they assist in cleaning it up.

Sincerely,



M. McGahan
McGahan Utilities, Inc.

cc: Honorable Ted Stevens
United States Senate
522 Hart Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Senator Jalmar Kerttula
Box 2
Palmer, Alaska 99645

Representative Jim Zawacki
Box 783
Girdwood, Alaska 99587

Honorable Donald E. Young
United States House of Rep.
2331 Rayburn House Ofc. Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Frank H. Murkowski
United States Senate
709 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ray Wipperman
Alaska Public Util. Comm.
420 "L" Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

MCGAHAN UTILITIES, INC.
P.O. BOX 8446
NIKISHKA, ALASKA 99635

August 4, 1989

Governor Steve Cowper
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Honorable Governor Cowper;

Enclosed find a copy of the letter sent to D.E.C., Dennis Kelso, and our legislators.

Since this letter was sent, we have not heard anything on this matter until August 2, 1989, at which time Ms. Tonkin from the Soldotna D.E.C. office came out and took water samples. The result of these samples according to Jane Tonkin's phone call early this morning, show 11 ppb of tetrachloroethylene.

D.E.C. is sending out a public notice warning people not to use the water. This includes not using it for fish processing, and as we have two fish processing plants on our water system in dire need of the water supply for this is their busy season, we need funding to locate and develop a new source of water to serve the approximately 400 people on our water system as well as the businesses which include these fish processing plants.

The use of hazardous spill/waste fund may be one way to help mitigate the problem.

Immediate action is necessary as this affects many people and the economy of this area as well.

Sincerely,



M. McGahan, President
McGahan Utilities, Inc.

cc: Garrey Peska
Bob Evans

HEALTH ADVISORY

As a result of the continued analysis of water from the McGahan Utilities water system in Nikiski, Alaska, it has been found that the water again exceeds proposed federal standards for tetrachloroethylene. Samples drawn from residential taps in late July and early August, 1989, showed tetrachloroethylene concentrations of 9 to 11 parts per billion (ppb). The proposed federal standard for tetrachloroethylene is 5 ppb.

Alternate drinking water sources and methods of eliminating contaminants from this public drinking water system are currently being sought by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC). In the meantime, customers of the McGahan system should not use water from this system for drinking or for cooking that requires large amounts of water. The water is safe for use in washing and cleaning.

An extensive investigation conducted this spring by ADEC determined that the source of the contamination was the site of an old laundromat/drycleaners formerly located in the vicinity of the McGahan production wells. Copies of the report generated by this investigation are available for review at ADEC's Kenai District Office, located in the Blazy Mall in Soldotna, 262-5210.

An information sheet on tetrachloroethylene is attached. Copies of the latest health advisories are also available at ADEC's Kenai District Office and at the Nikiski Fire Station, 776-8400 or 283-4388.

STATE OF ALASKA

STEVE COWPER, GOVERNOR

DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
P.O. BOX 0, JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-1800

Telephone No.
465-2600

August 23, 1989

The Honorable Jim Zawacki
Alaska House of Representatives
3111 "C" Street, Suite 415
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Representative Zawacki:

Thank you for your letter of June 7 regarding the McGahan Water Utility in Nikiski. The 1977 contamination incident and possibility of financial assistance are addressed in my enclosed letter to Mr. McGahan. Therefore, let me address your request for information on the specific contamination levels at the McGahan site, and the dangers involved.

I have attached a summary of all the samples which have been taken related to the McGahan site. There were three main contaminants found in the McGahan water system. Tetrachloroethylene (also known as perchloroethylene or PCE) was found at levels as high as 26.2 parts per billion (ppb) (McGahan well #1 2/7/89). All of the nine samples taken from the McGahan well #1 were well above the proposed federal maximum contaminant level for drinking water of 5 ppb. Additionally, there were 14 samples from the distribution system above the level of 5 ppb.

The second contaminant found was 1,1,1-trichloroethane. Although this contaminant was detected in a number of samples, it was never found in any concentration near the federal maximum contaminant level of 200 ppb.

The third prominent contaminant found was nitrate-N. The state and federal maximum contaminant level for this contaminant is 10 parts per million (ppm). All samples analyzed for this contaminant were significantly below this level.

Tetrachloroethylene, which is ranked by the Environmental Protection Agency as a probable human carcinogen, is the contaminant of most concern in the McGahan Water Utility. Lifetime exposure to PCE at the levels found in the McGahan well #1 may result in excess cancer risk of approximately six in one million.

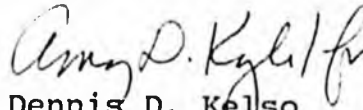
The Honorable Jim Zawacki

-2-

August 23, 1989

Thank you for your interest and concern in this serious and unfortunate situation. I know you share my desire to see this situation resolved as soon as possible. We will continue to inform your office of our progress.

Sincerely,


Dennis D. Kelso
Commissioner

Enclosure

McGAHAN WATER SYSTEM LAB RESULTS
(compilation date 7/17/89)

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SAMPLE DATE</u>	<u>LAB USED</u>	<u>SAMPLE NUMBER</u>	<u>PCE (ppb)</u>	<u>1,1,1-tric. (ppb)</u>	<u>Nitrate-N (and other)</u>	
McGahan Well #1	12/30/88	DEC	88KB013A	12.7	6.0		
	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT008	11.7	3.9		
	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH002	15.2	6.6	5.5 ppm	
	2/7/89	DEC	89JFT002A	22.5	3.0		
	2/7/89	CG	89JFT002B	26.2	2.9		
	2/16/89	DEC	89JFT015	18.9	<3.0#		
	2/23/89	DEC	89PDH008	12.9	<3.0#	4.10 ppm	
	3/7/89	DEC	89JFT028	17.7	<3.0#		
	5/8/89	URC	1-D. Rappe	23.1	1.5		
McGahan Well #2	12/30/88	DEC	88KB012A	3.7	9.9		
	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT007	<2.0#	7.0		
	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH001	<2.0#	5.38	3.83 ppm	
	2/7/89	DEC	89JFT003A	3.8	8.3		
	2/7/89	CG	89JFT003B	2.70	10.0		
	2/16/89	DEC	89JFT016	4.3	7.4		
	2/23/89	DEC	89PDH007	5.0	7.5	5.71 ppm	
	3/7/89	DEC	89JFT027	4.4	8.4		
	5/8/89	URC	6 (D. Rappe)	4.7	10.5		
	7-19-89	URC	(M. McGahan)	9.4	13		
McGahan Distribution System: 8-2-89		NTL	89JFT098	11	11		
			89JFT099	11	11		
<u>Line #24</u>							
Fred's Radiator	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT010	12.9	7.0		
	2/7/89	DEC	89JFT001A	3.7	8.7	2.3 ppb p+m-xylene 1.4 ppb o-xylene 1.6 ppb toluene	
	2/16/89	DEC	89JFT018	4.8	7.1		
	2/24/89	DEC	89JFT025A	4.7	6.8		
	2/24/89	CG	89JFT025B	7.70	12.2		
	3/7/89	DEC	89JFT029	4.2	7.6		
	Tristata	12/22/88	CG	88DL003	24.7	9.82	
	<u>Line #25</u>						
Mac McGahan Home	12/13/88	DEC	88JFT001	14.2	7.5		
	12/22/88	CG	88DL002	23.3	9.26		
	3/27/89	URC	263	5.0	9.0		
	6/14/89	URC	Aurora Hts.	4.8*	12.5*	0.6* ppb 1,1-di- chloro- ethylene	
Kevin Williams Home	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT009	15.7	8.8		

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<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SAMPLE DATE</u>	<u>LAB USED</u>	<u>SAMPLE NUMBER</u>	<u>PCB (ppb)</u>	<u>1,1,1-tric. (ppb)</u>	<u>Nitrate-N (and other)</u>
McGahan Distribution System (cont.)						
<u>Line WCH</u>						
Steve's Chevron	9/23/88	ARI	88KAK318	4.9	7.6	
	12/13/88	DEC	88JFT002	14.2	7.5	
	12/22/88	CG	88DL001	12.0	9.63	(1.7ppb tol)
D. P. Toloff Crane	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT011	13.5	8.1	
	2/16/89	DEC	89JFT017	5.1	7.4	
Land & Marine Rentals	2/7/89	DEC	89JFT004A	3.2	8.2	
	2/7/89	CG	89JFT004B	4.23	9.94	
	2/24/89	DEC	89JFT024A	4.9	6.9	
	2/24/89	CG	89JFT024B	7.87	12.2	
	3/7/89	DEC	89JFT030	4.2	7.8	
<u>Line WDM</u>						
Nikishka Laundromat	1/9/89	DEC	89JFT012	14.9	8.3	
<u>Line "Trunk"</u>						
Nikiski Fire Station	12/22/88	CG	88DL004	23.4	9.54	
Dee Rappe Home	12/28/88	ARI	88KB007A	0.2U	7.1	
	12/28/88	CG	88KB007	ND	5.83	
	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT013	<2.0	4.5	
	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH003	<2.0	4.7	
	2/24/89	DEC	89JFT022			5.58 ppm
Oilfield Salvage, Inc.	12/27/88	ARI	88XB003A	0.1J	0.6	
	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT006	<2.0	<3.0	
	2/24/89	DEC	88JFT020			3.63 ppm
Tuboscope	2/30/88	DEC	88XB014A	<2.0	<3.0	
	1/9/89	DEC	88JFT005	<2.0	<3.0	
	2/24/89	DEC	89JFT021			5.45 ppm
Cook Inlet Processors						
Potable Well	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH005	<2.0	<3.0	<.05 ppm
Nonpotable Well	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH006	<2.0	<3.0	<.05 ppm
Barbara Dominick Home (Lot 12)	12/30/88	DEC	88XB010A	<2.0	<3.0	
	3/15/89	DEC	89JFT026			<.05 ppm
North Kanai Realty (Ren Johnson)						
	12/28/88	ARI	88XB009A	0.2U	0.2U	
	1/31/89	DEC	89PDH004	<2.0	<3.0	<.05 ppm
	2/24/89	DEC	89JFT023			<.05 ppm

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<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SAMPLE DATE</u>	<u>LAB USED</u>	<u>SAMPLE NUMBER</u>	<u>PCE (ppb)</u>	<u>1,1,1-tric. (ppb)</u>	<u>Nitrate-N (and other)</u>
Nikiski High School	12/28/88 6/15/88	ARI CG	88KB008A NIK HS, WELL2	0.2U	0.2U	ND
Offshore Systems-Well #1 (Marathon)	12/27/88	ARI	88KB002A	0.2U	0.2U	
Offshore Systems-Well #2 (Marathon)	12/27/88	ARI	88KB001A	0.2U	0.2U	
Northern Fabrication	12/27/88	ARI	88KB005A	0.2U	0.2U	
Elaine Carpenter Home	12/30/88	DEC	88KB011A	<2.0	<3.0	
Jack Brewer Home	12/30/88	DEC	88KB015A	<2.0	<3.0	
Rediske Home	12/30/88	DEC	88KB016A	<2.0	<3.0	
Sleepers Trailer Court (Well #3)	12/30/88	DEC	88KB017A	<2.0	<3.0	
North Kenai DOT Yard	12/30/88	DEC	88JFT003	<2.0	<3.0	
Margaret Howell Home	12/30/88	DEC	88JFT004	<2.0	<3.0	

KEY

- CG - Chemical and Geological Laboratories
 - ARI - Analytical Resources, Inc.
 - DEC - DEC Douglas Laboratory
 - URC - Umpqua Research Company
 - ND - None detected
 - U - Indicates compound was analyzed for but not detected at the given detection limit
 - J - Indicates an estimated value when result is less than specified detection limit
 - * - Result listed is verbal notification only, hard copy not yet received by KDO
 - # - Indicates some analyte present, but levels below detection limit
- NIL - Northern Testing Lab

NOTE: The McCahan water system switched from Well #1 to Well #2 on 2/1/89. The system had run on Well #2 during the summer of 1988; it is unknown exactly when the system was switched to Well #1, but it is believed to be sometime in September, 1988.

DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
P.O. BOX 0, JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-1800

Telephone No.
(907) 465-2600

August 23, 1989

Mr. M. McGahan
McGahan Utilities, Inc.
P.O. Box 8446
Nikishka, AK 99635

Dear Mr. McGahan:

Thank you for your letter of June 24. I regret the problems you are currently experiencing with your water system. I hope and expect that this Department can provide both technical and financial support to help solve your problem.

Before discussing methods of correction I must first address a few basic misunderstandings that I believe you hold. You state that Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) personnel "had known there was a problem since August of 1988" and that at the time of the regular inspection of your water system on October 12, 1988, knew there was "contamination in [your] water" but "did not see fit to inform" you. Please bear in mind that the tetrachloroethylene (PCE) contamination in the McGahan Public Utilities was found by accident. In November 1988, water used to clean drilling augers for a contaminated site investigation was found to contain PCE and 1,1,1-trichloroethane (TCA). The Department determined that this auger rinse water had been drawn from your water system. By late November, a plan had been set up to test water from your system. Because you were in Texas at that time, it took a week or so to locate someone else (namely, your daughter, Dee Rappe) to assist ADEC personnel in the sampling process. At a meeting with your daughter in December 1988, ADEC personnel informed your daughter of our concerns

The Department did not "push the panic button" on December 28, 1988. A health advisory was issued on that date, but only after three sets of water samples had been analyzed by three different approved laboratories. Each set of samples had shown both PCE and TCA contamination, and the last two sets of samples indicated PCE concentrations considerably over the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of five parts per billion (ppb) proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Fortunately, TCA levels were found to be well below the MCL for that chemical. The health advisory was issued to inform users of the McGahan Public Utility of what the Department found in the water they were drinking.

August 23, 1989

Although ADEC discovered that wastewater was being illegally discharged from a laundromat in August 1977 and prosecuted the violation, we were unaware that there was anything other than laundry wastewater being discharged to the surface of the ground behind the establishment. The PCE found in your wells and in soils and groundwater adjacent to the old laundromat, appears to have come from used dry cleaning solvent dumped onto the ground behind the dry cleaners. This was not a part of the case against the laundromat. Because soap and water is rarely a threat to a well at the distance the contamination occurred from your well, the Department would not have seen a need to notify you specifically of this event.

The Department did ask you to use only one well in order to reduce PCE concentrations in your water system, which enabled the Department to revoke the health advisory. According to extensive analyses of your water, the PCE concentration in one of your two wells was consistently over the proposed MCL for this chemical and just under the MCL for the second well. Consequently, the Department asked you to use only the second well to supply water to the McGahan Public Utility and to regularly monitor PCE levels in the second well. It was on the basis of your agreement to these restrictions that ADEC was able to rescind the health advisory in March 1989. The monitoring of the second well has now shown PCE at levels above the proposed MCL and, consequently, the health advisory had to be reissued on August 4, 1989.

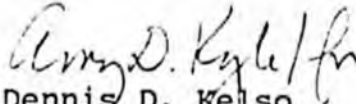
Regardless of past events, you are still faced with a very real contamination problem that you did not create. This contamination is a hardship not only for you but for the majority of the residents of Nikiski as well. Because we are not aware of any methods that could be used to decontaminate the aquifer and allow its use as a public water supply, another source of water is needed.

We are prepared to assist you and those Nikiski residents your system serves by conducting drilling and water testing to determine if a water source of sufficient quantity and quality is available at greater depths or in other nearby locations. If we find that potable water can be obtained at a reasonable cost, by deepening the existing well or drilling another well, we will make the modifications using funds provided by the Governor and Legislature to deal with contamination on the Kenai Peninsula. We would intend to try to recover our costs from the person responsible for contaminating the aquifer, if possible.

August 23, 1989

Again, I regret the problem you now face and I understand your frustration. I am pleased that we may be able to help with the solution. However, the ultimate solution will require the continued cooperation and assistance of area legislators, the Borough, the residents, yourself, and others. I look forward to the effort and a successful outcome.

Sincerely,


Dennis D. Kelso
Commissioner

cc: Senator Ted Stevens
Senator Frank Murkowski
Representative Don Young
Senator Jalmar Kerttula
Representative Jim Zawacki
Ray Wipperman, Public Utilities Commission

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 205 10-8025

JAMES H. ENGLISH, STAFF DIRECTOR
J. KEITH KENNEDY, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

July 19, 1989

Mack McGahan
McGahan Utilities, Inc.
P.O. Box 8446
Nikishka, Alaska 99635

Dear Mack:

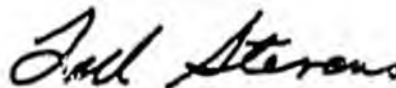
Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the contaminated soil near your wells.

In an effort to assist you, I have made an inquiry with the DEC and asked them to look into this matter and address your concerns.

Thanks again for writing.

With best wishes,

Cordially,



TED STEVENS

A year later, McGahan water woes linger

By JON LITTLE
Staff Writer

Cut

It's been a year since George and Tina Lagoutaris were forced to haul clean water from their home in Soldotna to Sourdough Sal's Restaurant in Nikiski.

And the chore of loading 1,500 gallons a month in the back of their pickup truck has hurt the restau-

rant-owners' pocketbooks, not to mention George's back.

"It's just a real pain," said Tina. And they believe they're not the only ones suffering.

A year ago today, Sourdough Sal's and an estimated 400 other customers of the McGahan Utilities water system were advised by the state Department of Environmental Conservation that their tap water might harm their

health.

Traces of a hydrocarbon-based chemical used as a solvent and dry-cleaning fluid were found during a test of the water supply.

A health advisory warning people not drink the water remained in effect Wednesday, the DEC said.

The source of the chemical tetrachloroethylene, according to the DEC, was a laundromat that once piped its wastewater onto the

soil not far from the McGahan wellhouse at Mile 27 of the Kenai Spur Highway. The building is gone and its owner has not been found.

So dealing with the water contamination has been anything but simple. Residents and shop owners who pay monthly bills to McGahan Utilities have called for action. The

See WATER, back page

...Water woes

Continued from page 1

DEC has said that about all it can do is investigate and point out what is clean and what is not. And the owner of the utility, Mac McGahan, has said the whole thing wasn't his fault to begin with — why should he pay the tens of thousands of dollars needed to correct it?

McGahan has also said he doubted whether the laundromat was the source of contamination,

and he has called the DEC to task for drumming up fear of a chemical that is currently unregulated.

The state agency has said all along that federal regulation of the chemical, probably a limit of 5 parts per billion in drinking water, is due soon. Samples from McGahan wells have wavered just above or below the proposed standard.

The DEC has hired two contractors in the last year to come up with some answers. First, the Anchorage environmental research firm of Hart Crowser reported this summer that the defunct Johnson's Laundry was the most likely

source of tetrachloroethylene, also known as perc or PCE.

And recently, Harding Lawson Associates of Anchorage, was paid \$45,000 to drill an exploratory water well near the two contaminated wells that supply McGahan customers. Six inches in diameter, the 172-foot well punched below the existing 85-foot aquifer and found what appears to be an abundant supply of water, said Paul Horwath, a DEC environmental engineer.

But test results are not yet in, Horwath said, most importantly those that will say if the new source of water is drinkable. The

findings are expected in January.

"We don't expect this to be a production well," Horwath said. "It could possibly be used as a backup well."

If the deeper aquifer can handle the load and supply good water, Horwath said an expensive eight-inch well would then need to be drilled — wide enough to accommodate a powerful submersible pump.

"As far as I know, this is the first documented site in the state where tetrachloroethylene was found in the groundwater," Horwath said. Water contaminated by perc in Girdwood was traced to bad pip-

ing. "I believe as public water systems are required to sample for those kinds of contaminants ... we'll start to encounter additional cases."

Federal regulations requiring water suppliers with more than 3,300 customers to test for volatile organics and other elements are expected to take effect sometime in January, according to Jane Tonkin, a DEC field officer. That affects the cities of Kenai and Homer.

Smaller public water systems, such as McGahan Utilities, would be brought into the testing framework in 1991, Tonkin said.

City/State

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Nikiski receives second water warning

By JEAN LAMMING
Times Writer

For the second time in eight months Nikiski residents have been warned that their tap water contains unsafe levels of a cleaning solvent officials believe was left behind by a laundry that operated in the Kenai Peninsula millinery town in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Alaska Department of Conservation issued its most recent health warning to about 400 Nikiski residents Friday, said Paul Horwath, who is an environmental engineer in the DEC's Kenai office.

Tests in late July and early August found levels of tetrachloroethylene at

Unsafe levels of chemical still plague residents

between nine and 11 parts per billion in a well that serves a privately owned, public water system. The Environmental Protection Agency advises that concentrations of tetrachloroethylene above five parts per billion are not safe.

Tetrachloroethylene is a refined petroleum product used most commonly as a cleaning solvent by dry cleaners. It is also used as a degreasing agent.

It is recognized as a possible carcinogen.

The solvent was found in one of two wells operated by McGahan Utilities

water system. McGahan stopped using its other well in December of 1988, when the DEC found unsafe levels of tetrachloroethylene in its water. The company began pumping water from the second well, which at the time, tested as safe, Horwath said.

The DEC and McGahan continued to monitor the second well, and on July 19, tests measured 9.4 parts per billion of tetrachloroethylene in the water. On Aug. 2, the DEC resampled and found 11 parts per billion in two locations.

The levels are not especially high,

but because the EPA is in the process of placing the solvent on the lists of chemicals it regulates, the DEC issued the health orders.

"These concentrations are quite low," Horwath said Monday. "Some people are having water and have been since the first advisory was issued and some people don't feel they're at risk," he said.

According to an investigation just completed by a private contractor, the cleaning solvent could have been left behind by Johnson's Laundry, a dry clean-

ing business that operated from 1933 to 1978 in Nikiski, a tanker port just north of Kenai.

Low levels of tetrachloroethylene were found in soil as far as 80 feet below ground where the laundry had operated in a mobile home, Horwath said. The site is about 500 feet from the two McGahan wells.

DEC officials believe the solvent could have either been dumped there, or discarded through the wastewater system and then leached out of a septic tank.

Horwath said he didn't think it would have ever been legal to discard tetrachloroethylene. **Sec Water, page B-4**

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oroethylene. Typically, used solvent is returned to the manufacturer, processed, and resold.

The McGahan wells consist of 8-inch steel pipes that tap into a water table about 80 feet below ground. The DEC-contracted investigation of the site showed that the solvent could have slowly leached down through the ground until it ran into an impermeable silt/clay layer in the earth, and then ran laterally across that layer until it reached the aquifer.

The DEC doesn't know how long the chemical has been seeping into the water table, or whether the problem is getting better or worse.

In a test well located between the

McGahan wells and the old laundry site, one test found 215 parts per billion of the solvent in the water, Horwath said.

Possible solutions include treating the ground water to remove the solvent and piping water in from a fresh source.

The DEC doesn't regularly test for tetrachloroethylene in any water system. The Nikiski problem was discovered about a year ago when the DEC used the water to wash special surveying tools to be used in a soil sample. Workers tested the cleansing water to make sure none of the compounds they were looking for in the soil got on the tools from the water.

When the EPA lists the solvent as a regulated chemical, it will be tested for more often, he said.