



COLBY FREE PRESS

6 pages

Former Ace Services site clean-up Price tag doubles to \$5.1 million, official says

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Federal and state officials were in Colby on Monday with proposed changes, costs and timelines in addressing the chromium-contaminated groundwater at the former Ace Services site, 345 Convesse Ave.

Among the changes in the amended proposal, the price tag has more than doubled from \$2.1 million to \$5.1 million, construction of a new building is now necessary, the method of treating the contaminated groundwater is different and more extraction wells are needed, said Glenn Curtis with the Environmental Protection Agency. Along with those changes, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment has also agreed to pay for the installation of a water line for the 10 residents east of town whose private water wells are threatened by the contamination spreading.

"The plume is two to three times larger and further east of the site than we originally thought in 1999," Curtis said, "and the proposed changes will look at a whole remedy by extracting the water faster through a series of filters that is a more thorough method."

Removing the chromium contaminants in the groundwater, he explained, will also require a larger treatment structure and the current building at the site is not sound enough to house that system.

The newer proposal calls for razing the two existing buildings at the current site and replacing them with the larger treatment facility.

Also under the amendment, five or six clusters of extraction wells will be installed. Three of those new wells will be located on the north side of the rail-



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Byron Sowers (left), one of 10 residents east of town whose private well could become affected by the chrome contamination in the near future, spoke with Bob Stewart, project manager with EPA based in Kansas City, after the public hearing concluded on Monday.

road tracks near Sunrise Trailer Park on the far east corner of town and the other three extraction wells will be placed in the street on Cooper Ave.

The extraction wells will begin pumping the contaminated water at a rate of 800 gallons a minute or 1.15

million gallons a day into the ion exchange treatment process. After the chromium is extracted it will then be discharged either to the city's water supply system or down the Prairie Dog Creek.

"We estimate it will take 12 to 13

years for the cleanup to be completed," said Bob Stewart, project manager with EPA, "and we believe with these changes we can remove the chrome faster."

The timeline for beginning the work on the building is in the fall of 2001, he

said. Within the next 12 to 15 months following that date, Stewart said, the agency will be ready to operate. "We will also have a 6- to 10-month trial period to make sure everything is working properly," he said. However, before the project begins, the public has until July 27 to submit written comments on the changes.

Along with officials, there were approximately 25 people attending the hearing and many had questions or concerns.

For Maurice Phelps, a local businessman, Cooper Avenue is an important street for his business and he said he objects to using that area for extraction wells.

"Isn't there another way to do this?" he asked, "another piece of property to put the well house on?"

In response, Stewart said, the EPA does not have funds to buy land and when residents were asked if they would be willing to have wells put on their property, all of them refused.

The only option left, according to Stewart, was to place three enclosed extraction wells in the street on the far west side of Cooper Ave. By placing them as far west as possible, Stewart said, the east side of the street should be passable.

Wayne Bossert, with the groundwater management district in Colby, asked about the spread of contamination. In response, Stewart said, he believes the plume can be contained without further spread once the pumping operations begin.

Dorothy Metzler, one of the residents east of town, said she was unhappy that there weren't more city officials or county commissioners present at this meeting. However, it was

pointed out that Carolyn Armstrong, city manager; Gerry Bieker, public works director; and Herb Sunderman, city councilman, were present.

Les Haremza, another citizen, asked if the pollution is getting worse to which Stewart said, no, but noted that the contaminated water won't naturally degrade through dilution.

Tim Adrian, a local farmer, asked if the state or feds had considered the option of using the treated water for irrigation purposes. In response, state officials said there were drawbacks to that option ranging from the fact that the water could only be used during part of the year and discharge limits meeting standards.

Byron Sowers, another resident east of town, said he was concerned about being given only 12 days to decide whether he could hook up to the city line. In response, the state said those wells affected east of town by the contamination are not required to hook up immediately. Randy Carlson, with the KDHE, said residents in the contaminated plume area will have the option to hook up with the city system at any time in the future should their wells test higher in contaminants than allowed by state standards.

One resident, Bernie Meyer, asked about putting the treated water back into the ground. According to Carlson, reinjecting the water at other sites hasn't worked well. "There were lots of problems, expense and the success rate wasn't good."

People interested in offering an opinion on the proposal can do so by writing to Hattie Thomas, Office of External Programs, 901 N. 5th St., Kansas City, Kan. 66101; or call (913) 551-7003 or (800) 223-0425.

Ace Services dates back to 1954; problems surface in early 70s

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Agriculture Conservation Engineering Services, Inc., also known as Ace Services, was located just two and one-half blocks east of the Thomas County Courthouse from 1954 until 1990. The service offered was in applying chrome plating to sickle knives used on farm equipment.

In 1971, the Kansas Department of

Health and Environment did an investigation revealing that hazardous materials located at the site needed to be removed, according to Free Press articles in August of 1991.

In addition, the study noted that contaminated soils at the site also needed to be removed.

At the recent meeting held Monday, Bob Stewart, EPA project manager in Kansas City, said that citizens were

complaining in 1971 that contaminants were being poured on the ground immediately west of an unnamed tributary to Prairie Dog Creek.

Eventually, the facility installed concrete retention vats and an evaporation lagoon, he said.

"These measures were taken to collect the discharged wastewater," he said.

However, the evaporation lagoon

was not lined and chromium contaminated wastewater contaminated the soil, seeped into the ground and contaminated the ground water.

The Environmental Protection Agency put the Ace Services Site on the National Priorities List in 1995 after the KDHE submitted a report of its findings to them back in 1991.

Contaminated sites are put on the National Priorities List when the po-

tentially responsible parties either refuse or are financially unable to assume the responsibility for the work necessary in cleaning up a contaminated area, according to information from the state and federal agencies.

Thus far, Stewart said, the federal government has spent \$1.5 million at this site in testing, monitoring wells, feasibility studies, and remedial design. Included in the \$1.5 million is the

\$250,000 the federal government spent in trying to clean up the building area.

An additional \$5.1 million will be spent in the future by the EPA under the Superfund program, which was established by Congress to clean up hazardous waste sites.

The amount of money the state has spent on this site was not immediately available.

City of Colby budget gets close look at workshop

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

The Colby City Council and department heads ironed out some final kinks in the proposed 2002 budget at a workshop on Tuesday night.

The budget will include some new equipment, however City Manager Carolyn Armstrong and council members said they wanted to keep any increase to the minimum necessary.

The largest increase is in salaries and benefits. Insurance and social security taxes are going up, said Armstrong. Many departments are also experiencing less turnover, resulting in higher salaries.

One area where about \$18,000 savings were found was a new street sweeper. The current unit has high maintenance costs, said Gerry Bieker, director of public works.

"There is a lot of little stuff," Bieker said of the maintenance. He cited several items, like a fan pulley, just enough different that they couldn't be bought at a regular parts house. The sweeper manufacturer was charging a premium price for the items.

Bieker said the current sweeper, a 1997 model, was "low-end," but he

"I've looked into a front-loading unit for the commercial truck...and a front-loader would be hard on a residential route."

Gerry Bieker, public works director

couldn't say for sure that a high-end sweeper would be any cheaper on maintenance.

"I'd like to say it would," said Bieker, "but I can't."

Bieker had \$20,000 for the payment on a new sweeper in the budget. The council took that out, deciding not to buy one, but gave him an additional \$2,000 for maintenance.

Bieker also told the council he was planning for some repairs to the sewer plant. The plant is beyond its 30-35 year life expectancy, but is "working fine," said Bieker.

A tank wall that had buckled in the past is in need of replacement. "We have been patching it for some time," said Bieker.

The city hopes to be able to have a wall pre-manufactured and have the

plant down for a short time.

Bieker also wants to replace a 1989 packer truck for the sanitation department. Bieker said he is looking for ways to reduce costs without reducing service in the department.

"I've looked into a front-loading unit for the commercial truck," he said, "but the trucks back each other up, and a front-loader would be hard on a residential route."

One cost-cutting measure was combining summer grass pickup into two days, allowing the crews to do the normal three-day residential pickups without working overtime on Saturdays.

It would mean grass pickup would be Monday and Tuesday, with normal pickup Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and no Saturday pickup.

Councilman Eugene Wieland said the idea would save overtime without reducing service.

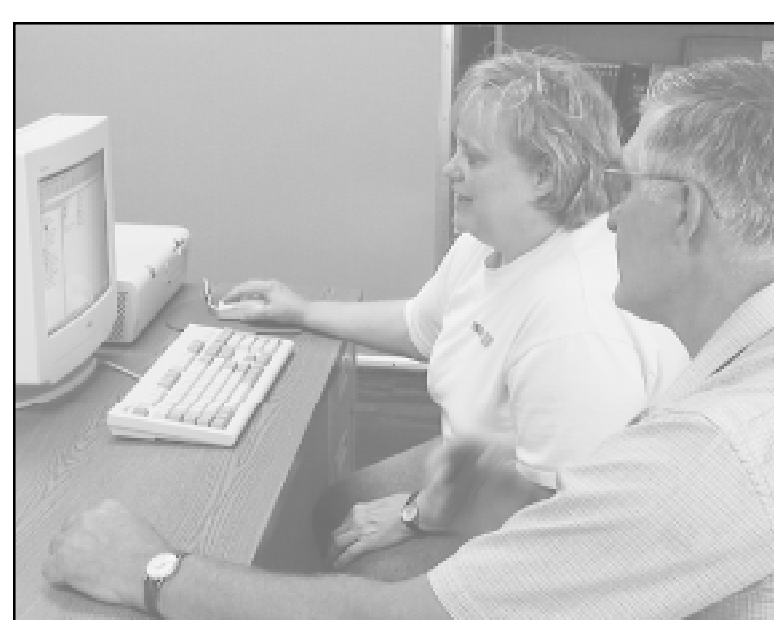
Two other vehicle replacements are on the list. The utilities department wants to replace a 1982 50' bucket truck and the administration department needs to replace a Chevy Celebrity, used by the building official, with 178,000 miles.

The bucket truck is in "pretty good shape" said director Corky Delziet, but will need some work and is obsolete. It's large gasoline engine has problems with overheating in alleys and it requires a second crane unit when replacing transformers, a difficult prospect in some tight areas.

The police department has a 1994 Taurus unmarked unit scheduled for replacement, which would make a good replacement for the building official. Police Chief Randy Jones said he hopes to find an off-lease unit similar to the Blazer they bought two years ago.

After the council finished, Armstrong told the council she expected to have the numbers ready to look at by the next council meeting on July 17.

Sacred gifts



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Kelly Richmond, district administrator for Williams Gas Pipeline in Colby, showed Sacred Heart Principal Dave Evert on Tuesday how to operate one of the four computers her company recently donated to the school. Richmond said she has been applying each year for three years to get computers for the school when the company does its upgrades, but this year her perseverance paid off. "I was hoping to get one or two computers with the request," she said, "but we got four." Evert said the computers will be used by fourth grade students.

Briefly

Weather: More of the same

Partly cloudy skies, continued warm temperatures, slight chance for thunderstorms, easterly winds 5-20 mph, highs 85-95 and lows in the 60s, can be expected in the Colby region right on through the weekend, reports the National Weather Service forecast center at Goodland. Colby's high Tuesday was 95 and the overnight low this morning was 66. Precipitation remains at 0.23 inches for the month to date. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 92 degrees. The records for July 11: 110 in 1954 and 46 in 1905. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Thieves hits businesses

Thieves broke into the Hi-Plains Co-op office in Gem and the Rexford Grain Company in Rexford on Sunday night, stealing an undisclosed amount of cash, according to C.D. Hopper, investigator for the Thomas County Sheriff's Office.

Hopper said the break-ins took place sometime between closing time Sunday and 7:30-8 a.m. Monday, when elevator employees came in to work. The Gem elevator closed at 6 p.m. and Rexford at 7 p.m.

"Right now, we have no suspects," said Hopper. According to Hopper, the burglars gained access by breaking windows at each location. Anyone with knowledge of either

break-in should call the sheriff's office at 462-4570.

'Relay for Life' meeting today

The Relay for Life Committee will meet today at 6:30 p.m. at the State Farm office, 904 E. 4th St. The purpose of the meeting, said Bob Coleman, one of the organizers, is to invite people interested in having a team or volunteer to serve on a committee for the upcoming event in August. Everyone is encouraged to attend this meeting. For questions or information, call Coleman at 462-2724.

Blood drive planned in Colby

Colby will be hosting a blood drive, Thursday, July 26,

from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the American Legion, 1850 W. 4th St. In order to give blood, said Donna Finley, director of the Thomas County Red Cross, a person must be in generally good health, at least 17 years of age and weigh 110 pounds or more.

Retirement picnic today

Colby Community College will host a retirement/old-timers/farewell picnic honoring Roger Hale, taking early retirement, Gary and Sue Webb who are leaving, and Ken Mitchell, former art instructor at the college, who is painting the mural in the Bedker Memorial Complex. It will be at 6 p.m. today in the Student Union. The public is invited.

