

Griswold, Jim, EMNRD

From: Griswold, Jim, EMNRD
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2015 8:51 AM
To: Martin, David, EMNRD
Cc: Catanach, David, EMNRD; bradford.billings@state.nm.us; Dade, Randy, EMNRD; Behrens, Larry, EMNRD; Wojahn, Beth, EMNRD
Subject: Brine well article in the Carlsbad Current Argus

Expert: Brine well collapse sooner than thought

Sarah A Matott, Carlsbad Current-Argus 4:37 p.m. MDT October 22, 2015



This sign warns drivers of the potential dangers of the brine well near the South Y. (Photo: Current-Argus file photo)

CARLSBAD — The Carlsbad I&W Brine Well is closer to a probable collapse after the September 2014 flooding, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department officials said.

The New Mexico legislature's Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee held a meeting in Carlsbad on Thursday to discuss a number of related topics, including EMNRD officials giving the status of the Carlsbad Brine Well.

EMNRD Secretary David Martin and Bureau Chief Jim Griswold told the committee that last year's flooding and surface activity are factors that has sped up the timeline for a potential well collapse.

The brine well is located near the city's "South Y," the location where S. Canal Street splits into Highway 285 to the east and National Parks Highway to the west.

Last September, EMNRD officials and a geo-technical engineer for AMEC Environment & Infrastructure, Inc. presented a feasibility study of the brine well to the committee.

"The statistical evaluations of probability of failure and cavern lifespan indicate a high probability of catastrophic failure within 10 to 25 years," the AMEC study said.

That was a year ago, now, EMNRD officials say that a number of factors have taken off a couple of years from that estimate.

"We are hoping that the monitoring system will let us know of a catastrophic event before it occurs at the surface," Griswold said.

EMNRD, however, presented four alternatives to the committee on Thursday to fixing the brine well. The most feasible option being filling the cavern with proper sediment and then continue monitoring, officials said.

This would permanently remedy the potential of a sinkhole forming and would cost between \$15 and \$25 million.

The state, however, is currently looking for a way not only to fund fixing the sinkhole, but also looking to creating a committee that would head the sinkhole remediation.

Currently, the land the sinkhole sits on is not owned by anyone, and State Sen. Carroll Leavell said that in this next legislative session a bill in the Senate and the House of Representatives will be introduced to create a "Brine Well Remediation Authority."



The New Mexico legislature's Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee met Thursday in Carlsbad to listen to a number of topics. This included a status of the Carlsbad Brine Well (Photo: SARAH MATOTT - CURRENT-ARGUS)

This authority would be "granted all powers necessary and appropriate to carry out and effectuate its public and corporate purposes," in order to fix the brine well.

It would include the Carlsbad mayor as the chair, along with the Eddy County Commissioner chair.

John Heaton, chair of the Carlsbad Mayor's Nuclear Task Force, spoke on behalf of Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway in regards to the city's involvement.

"They're some rumors that the city of Carlsbad will be responsible for partially funding this, but the Mayor says that the city will have no part in funding it, because we feel it is a state issue," Heaton said.

Chair of the Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee said this is an issue that needs serious attention and something needs to be done as quickly as possible.

"I'm really glad that we are dealing with it now," Brown said..

The I&W Brine Well was created as a solution mine operated by the company at the current location almost continuously from 1979 to July 2008. I&W was forced to close the mine after its process of injecting fresh water into the ground to dissolve the salt and extract brine caused a liquid-filled underground cavern to form.

Sarah Matott can be reached at 575-628-5546.