

Water kiosk dedicated at Algoma High School

Karen Ebert Yancey, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin 3:44 p.m. CST January 18, 2016



Kewaunee County Supervisor Lee Luft and Jay Schabelski, chief engineer of Stonehouse Water Technologies, demonstrate how the water access point at Algoma High School works for residents with contaminated wells. (Photo: Karen Ebert Yancey/Kewaunee County Star-News)

While Gov. Scott Walker was talking with residents about groundwater issues in Kewaunee County at a town hall-style meeting Thursday, some county leaders were taking matters into their own hands.

The Algoma School Board hosted a dedication Thursday of the first site in the county to offer a continuous supply of clean water to residents whose wells are contaminated.

"We are very proud of this effort," said Barb Rodgers, Algoma School Board president. "Access to clean water is a right that everyone should have."

Residents across the county have complained that in spite of the hundreds of wells identified as contaminated, neither the state or county have provided those property owners with any access to clean water nor, in many cases, funding to address their contaminated wells.

The dedication was attended by County Supervisor Lee Luft, who is chairman of the Kewaunee County groundwater task force. Some members of the task force are part of a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Short-Term Solutions Workgroup that is charged with providing short-term assistance to residents with well contamination. To date, the DNR has not communicated the group's recommendations, but they are expected to be issued sometime this month.

Nick Cochart, superintendent of schools, who is also on county's groundwater task force, has been asking the DNR to provide clean water to residents with contaminated wells since last summer.

When no water was provided, he worked with Stonehouse Water Technologies of Milwaukee to provide a kiosk of clean water outside the high school. The school board unanimously approved the water kiosk late last year, Rodgers said.

Residents who want access to the water can register with the school district. They are given jugs donated by the town of Lincoln that have labels donated by WS Packaging of Algoma.

"We can't do all we do in the school district without partnerships," Cochart said. He noted that the water is actually healthier than most water because it is filtered through a special water treatment system that is part of Stonehouses' technology.

"Stonehouse has been trying to get up here in the last few years," said Lynn Utesch of Kewaunee Cares, an environmental group that has been working on groundwater contamination issues in the county. "We need to thank them for being persistent in getting clean water to people here,"

Stonehouse is donating the water kiosk system to the school and hopes to offer its water filtration system to residents with contaminated well water. More information is available at www.stonehousewater.com or by calling the Algoma School District at 920-487-7001.