

WATER QUALITY PROJECT UPDATE--January 22, 2010

The San Luis Valley LEAP-HIGH Project (Landscape Environmental Assessment Plan-Health Inspired Goals for Humans) has almost completed their initial three-year project, funded through the EPA Environmental Justice, Collaborative Problem Solving program.

The collaborative partnership, made up of several environmental, business, civic and governmental, educational, and health organizations, has held regular monthly meetings to discuss the design and implementation of this first phase of the project. We have added additional partners, including the following:

- 1) Colorado State University Extension Service developed outreach material and provided \$5,000.00 of free nitrate/nitrite testing,
- 2) Montana State University developed the videos,
- 3) Seniors, Inc. provided personal outreach to Hispano villages,
- 4) U.S. Dept. of Agriculture provided free pesticide/herbicide tests for 45 households in strategic areas,
- 5) The Citizens for San Luis Valley Water received a \$20,000.00 EPA Environmental Justice Small Grant to do free household well testing for the LEAP HIGH Project,
- 6) The Department of Water Resources, Division 3 provided outreach materials for the presentations, and
- 7) The county nursing services for the five Valley counties helped us contact certain individual households of concern.

In the summer of 2009, the collaborative partners offered a well check-up presentation and free well testing to private, household-well owners in the SLV. In order to promote these presentations, gather participant names and encourage the importance of regular well testing, the partners used several types of outreach, including newspaper articles, church bulletins, radio announcements, informational booths, mailings and attendance at San Luis Valley public health fairs held in previous years. In addition, four educational radio programs were produced for the local public radio station that included:

- 1) Interview with Della Vieira (Alamosa County Nursing) and Maya ter Kuile (Alamosa River Foundation) about the findings from the initial testing, offered in 2006, and funded by the EPA.
- 2) Interview with Tami Thomas-Burton, EPA's Environmental Justice division, about environmental justice issues.
- 3) Interview with Perry Cabot, CSU Extension Water Quality Specialist about the well-educated programs offered by Montana State University and CSU Extension Services, including the internet tools and materials available.
- 4) Interview with Evelyn Vigil, owner and CEO of Sangre de Cristo Labs in Alamosa, Colorado, about the types of contaminants or heavy metals that have been found in private well water over the years that she has been testing.

During the months of May, June, and July of 2009, presentations were made in 15 different locations around the San Luis Valley. These included three each in Costilla, Alamosa, Saguache, and Rio Grande Counties, and two in Conejos County. Households

were asked to show SLV LEAP HIGH Project partners where their well was located on a map, fill out basic information about their individual well on a form and view a 40 minute powerpoint presentation imbedded with short videos reviewing basics in well background and maintenance. Participants were also given:

- 1) Folders produced by Colorado State University (CSU) of educational/information materials encouraging well log maintenance and keeping critical historical records accessible including septic system data, all in one place.
- 2) Form to fill out work with U.S. Dept. of Agriculture for free household well testing specific to Pesticide/Herbicides.
- 3) Updates from State of Colorado, Division 3, Water Resources Division that include proper well registration, rain water harvesting and gray water protocols.
- 4) A booklet produced by CSU and EPA containing background information and check lists for household well maintenance and critical resource management tools
- 5) A take home DVD showing well testing procedures, how to shock-chlorinate a well, and solutions to other problems associated with contamination within the well vicinity.
- 6) Free well testing kits were provided to all those who attended the presentation. Test kits included sampling for bacteria, nitrates/nitrites, and heavy metals.

Materials and presentations were also available in Spanish.

Over 400 people attended. Not all of those who attended returned a water sample, but over 300 households did take advantage of the free testing. Results from those households have been compiled in a database. A GIS map of the households that participated is currently being developed, and will be linked to the test results. This should enable SLV LEAP HIGH to provide maps that show problem areas in the SLV.

We have also compiled a newsletter that details the problems associated with certain compounds in the water, such as bacteria, arsenic, and low ph. This was mailed to all households who participated in the free testing. Additionally, several web materials were produced, and links to other relevant water websites was provided on the SLVEC.org website.

Over early part of 2010, we will be completing the mapping project, and writing a final report of the problems and issues found during this phase of well testing. This report will be mailed to interested households, including those who participated in the testing, those who attended the meetings and key public officials and agencies throughout the San Luis Valley and State of Colorado.