

The Intelligencer. Wheeling News-Register

Wheeling Water Protection Plan Is Under Final Review

Wheeling's plan to prevent a similar situation to that which left about 300,000 people in the Charleston area without potable water in 2014 is one step closer to adoption.

The city's new source water protection plan, mandated by West Virginia Senate Bill 373 — also known as the “spill bill” — received a final public hearing before the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Wednesday, although no residents spoke during the gathering at the City-County Building.

SB 373 was passed in 2014 following the Elk River chemical spill near Charleston. These mandated source water protection plans consist of management and contingency practices designed to prevent such events, as well as prepare stronger, faster responses to them.

Plans for the city of Cameron and Hammond Public Service District were also open for comment at Wednesday's meeting.

Wheeling draws its drinking water from the Ohio River, and has several wells available as a backup source.

Kendra Hatcher, an environmental scientist with Downstream Strategies, a consulting firm hired to organize Wheeling's plan, said the city is in a good position because of its involvement with the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission. This enables it to receive ample warning in case of a spill, something on which not every utility can depend, she said.

She said Wheeling's watershed covers an estimated 25,000 square miles, from

Erie, Pa., to Clarksburg. A main cause of concern within this area are 874 aboveground chemical storage tanks, some of which hold nearly 1 million gallons of possibly hazardous material.

As part of the plan, Wheeling's water department would inventory these tanks and communicate with their owners to understand what they contain and how such substances may be neutralized in the event of a leak or spill.

Scott Rodeheaver, assistant manager for the source water protection program with the DHHR, said a typical protection plan also accounts for alternative water sources and methods to isolate or divert contaminants from a treatment facility's intake.

Wheeling's water department would be responsible for notifying the public of a chemical spill within 30 minutes under the plan. During a public meeting in May, Wheeling Water Treatment Plant Manager Lori Siburt said the department is already doing much of what's in the proposed plan.

Residents are welcome to email comments or concerns to eedssourcewaterprotection@wv.gov until Sept. 28. Wheeling's plan may be viewed at wheelingwater.com.

For now, the plan will undergo further review by the DHHR before its final consideration and possible approval.

If adopted, the plan would be updated every three years.

COMMENTS

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