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Rowan County Approves Construction of Chemical Pump Station to Address Elevated Lead Levels in NEWS System

SALISBURY, NC April 6, 2021: Last night, the Rowan County Board of Commissioners approved a plan to construct a chemical pump station to assist Salisbury-Rowan Utilities (SRU) in combined efforts to find a long-term solution for elevated lead levels identified in some homes on the Rowan County Northeast Water System (NEWS). This is in unison with SRU's decision to adjust the pH level of the drinking water and change its corrosion control inhibitor from a blended phosphate to zinc orthophosphate.

Initially, elevated levels of lead were identified in drinking water in (4) four out of (20) twenty homes tested on the NEWS. Inspections of (2) two of the (4) four homes, combined with knowledge of the system, revealed that the homes' interior plumbing was the source of lead. Household plumbing materials containing lead are often found in homes built before 1986 containing copper plumbing with lead solder, as well as homes with brass faucets, or valves, or other components made of brass.

Rowan County has been working with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) and Virginia Tech University to identify a long-term solution to reduce corrosivity of the water to interior household plumbing and address lead levels in the NEWS. These efforts led to SRU's decision to request approval from NCDEQ to make treatment changes to raise the pH level of its drinking water to 7.4 and change the corrosion inhibitor from a blended orthophosphate to zinc orthophosphate. If approved, the purpose of the zinc orthophosphate corrosion inhibitor is to reduce the release of lead from private plumbing. SRU anticipates that the changes will be implemented by June 12, 2021.

As an interim measure, the Rowan County Board of Commissioners also voted in January 2021 to provide every customer with an active connection on the NEWS system with a free Brita pitcher with certified filters. In addition to the Brita pitcher and certified filters, every customer with an active connection on the NEWS received a free lead and copper water sampling kit so customers could voluntarily take and return water samples for lead and copper tests. To date 116 out of approximately 160 homes on the NEWS were tested.

A certified laboratory conducted the lead and copper tests and shared the results with customers that returned water samples. Out of the 116 connection sites tested, nine (9) were found to have lead levels above the 15 parts-per-billion USEPA Action Level.

In response to the test results and its continued work with NCDEQ and Virginia Tech University experts, Rowan County's Board of Commissioners also awarded a bid in the amount \$742,900.41 to construct a chemical pump station to assist with the distribution and treatment of drinking water delivered from SRU to the NEWS system. The pump station will allow the County to supplement treatment of drinking water, as needed, to consistently achieve target pH levels and zinc orthophosphate concentrations and reduce corrosivity of the water to interior household plumbing.

Rowan County and SRU are taking these steps because lead can cause serious health problems. **These steps will not immediately reduce the lead levels for customers within the water system. Customers should continue to use the measures indicated below until otherwise notified by Rowan County.** Customers can reduce their consumption of lead by doing the following:

- Have water samples from home taps collected and tested for the presence of lead. Homeowners are still encouraged to take part in Rowan County's FREE testing program.
- Let cold water run at the faucet for at least three minutes before using it for drinking or cooking.
- Use only cold water from the tap. Hot water in interior plumbing has the potential to absorb more lead. Heating or boiling water does NOT remove lead from drinking water.
- Regularly clean faucets' aerators. Lead particles can collect in aerators.
- Use the Brita water pitcher and certified filter provided by Rowan County.

For more information on our Brita pitcher distribution, the County's Lead and Copper testing program, and other information regarding NEWS, Rowan County invites its customers to visit its website at www.rowancountync.gov/water.

"The Board's actions last night are designed to work toward the right long-term solution for the NEWS system," said Rowan County Manager Aaron Church. "We thank our NEWS customers for testing their water and helping us gain a stronger assessment of the situation as we move forward."

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