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OurwaterQuality

Water-quality awareness on the rise

Last month the Santa Fe Green Building Summit & Expo was held at the new Santa Fe Community Convention Center. I think that the attendance and success of the event in this economic downturn even surpassed the expectations of its capable organizers, the Santa Fe Green Building Council of the Santa Fe Area Home Builders Association.

It was a hopeful indicator of environmental awareness, and the number of exhibits relating to water were evidence of the increasing interest in water purification.

The best side-benefit of the Expo was for those offering sustainable technologies to gather under one roof and get better acquainted with each other and our respective capabilities. The most common inquiry from attendees was, "What can you do to improve the quality of my water?" The answers ranged from the very simple "one system fits all" vendors to much more complex responses from exhibitors who offer multiple solutions dependent on water chemistry. The latter often replied with a sequence of counter-questions: Are you on municipal or well water? What are your principal concerns about your water? What are your expectations? What is your budget?

For owners of private wells, it was: Have you had your well tested recently? If the answer to this last question was negative, then the next logical question was, "Where is the property located?" This relates to the predictability of health-risk contaminants in certain geographic areas. But for all practical purposes, private wells should be approached as if "every well is a wildcat." Comprehensive laboratory testing is the basis of successful treatment of well water.

In a future column, I will be able to report on a Sandia National Laboratories/ Los Alamos National Laboratories Small Business Assistance Program. One of the major goals of this project is to compile well-test data and map the geographic distribution of naturally occurring contaminants in groundwater. Maps speak more loudly than words. It is the next step



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in documenting these concentrations and in explaining the geologic and hydrologic reasons for their distribution. I am hopeful that a future phase of this project will involve educating residents about the possible health-risk contaminants in their well water and instructing them in methods of minimizing their risk of exposure.

Another very encouraging development in water awareness, and test result availability and transparency, is the recent launch of the RACER (acronym for Risk Analysis Communication Evaluation and Reduction) process. This database and analysis tool includes samples taken for atmospheric, soil, sediment, vegetation, stormwater and groundwater data in and around Los Alamos National Laboratories by LANL and the New Mexico Environment Department. A crucial part of this project has been the involvement of community members and the New Mexico Community Foundation, which has the responsibility for broadening and enhancing public involvement in the RACER process. This project is carried out independently of LANL and the DOE by Colorado State University, which has subcontracted the technical work to Risk Assessment Corporation (RAC), a consortium of independent scientists and consultants. You may visit and navigate the RACER website at www.racernm.com.

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