

Prenter's Water Problems Goes to Boone County Courthouse

March 25, 2009/CoalValleyNews.com/ Citizens who have been complaining for more than a year about the unsanitary conditions of their water have taken their cause to the Boone County Courts.

There are 39 emergency motions for injunctive relief filed by residents in the heartland of coal country in the Prenter and Seth area of Boone County.

Their motion states that mining and dumping activities have rendered their water supply unsafe, undrinkable and unfit for human use and names 7 coal companies as responsible for the current water contamination.

The coal companies listed in the motion are Massey Energy, Omar Mining, Independence Coal Co., Black Castle Coal Co., Peabody Energy Corp., and Pine Ridge Coal Co.

The DEP issued two violations in Feb, 2006 for violations of coal slurry run-off. Coal slurry injections into underground mines are what citizens identify as the culprit in their water woes.

Residents have provided the court with studies conducted by noted scientists at two prestigious universities in West Virginia – Marshall and Wheeling Jesuit.

Findings of high levels of arsenic and lead in their water, by Dr. D. Scott Simonton, an environmental engineer at Marshall University, is referenced in their motion.

According to the court documents, the findings of these studies indicate that the contaminants found in the water can lead to a number of health problems, including intestinal lesions, high blood pressure, kidney and liver damage, and gastrointestinal distress.

Boone County Judge Will Thompson will have hearings on the motions this Thursday on whether or not to grant the community the relief they are seeking.

The residents are asking that the judge order the coal companies to provide an emergency supply of water within 24 hours, a temporary water supply within 72 hours, and a permanent water supply within 30 days, to all the residents of Prenter and Seth.

Additionally, they are asking that the emergency water supply be in the form of bottles delivered to each home on a weekly basis until a permanent water supply is available.

The Prenter community has obtained donations to purchase barrels to provide water to residents and WV American Water has provided water to the residents from Amazing Grace Fellowship Church at a cost of 25-cents per 125 gallons.

Additionally, Governor Manchin on Jan. 14 awarded a \$1.5 million small cities block grant that would bring water to the area. However, only \$200,000 of that monies were allocated from the 2008 fiscal budget.

Citizens contend that it will take considerable time to complete any public works project, despite reports that DEP has secured monies to break ground on a water system starting April 2009.

Many residents are still relying on well water to bathe, clean and wash their clothing and dishes and will continue to do so until clean water is piped into their homes.

For those residents who have opted to use the barrels, this past winter brought their own set of challenges. With temperatures dipping below freezing, many residents' only source of clean water remained frozen during the months of January and February.

The motion filed by the Boone County residents cite *Brown v. Rawl Sales*, a case currently before the Mingo County Circuit Court, only an hour south of Boone County, where coal slurry water contaminated wells of various people in their community.

The court in that action ordered the coal companies to provide clean water available to the residents.

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