

Salt water is found in four local wells

A Baton Rouge monitoring well indicates four of the city's wells have high levels of saltwater, authorities say.

But Baton Rouge Water Works says it now has more than 50 wells and it could absorb the loss of the four.

"We'd probably just have to buy some property and drill somewhere else," said Ike Peters, assistant superintendent of the water works.

The Government Street wells are the only ones "in danger in the near future," according to A.N. Turcan, director of the Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission.

While the finding is a reason for concern, it is not a reason for panic, Turcan said.

"Baton Rouge is not going to run out of fresh water," he added.

But he has suggested that the matter be further investigated so the city is not caught unprepared if and when the chloride content at some of the pumping stations starts to rise.

Chloride content normally is used as an indicator of saltwater, according to Turcan, because the test to determine the amount of chloride in water is so easy to run.

Turcan has suggested that the commission seek state or federal help in having a hydrologic model developed to determine the speed at which the saltwater is moving through the 1,500-foot aquifer.

He believes the problem is a localized pocket of saltwater trapped to the north of the Baton Rouge fault. All Baton Rouge water wells are located north of the fault, which is generally considered a protection against saltwater intrusion from the south.

A report presented to the commission states the previous chloride content of water coming from the observation well at Acadian and Broussard would plateau at 700-800 parts per million.

However, the latest readings from that well showed the chloride content at 1,400 parts per million. In addition, electric logs show water at the base of the aquifer appears to have a chloride content of about 3,000 parts per million at the monitoring well site.

The state standard for chlorides in drinking water is 250 parts per million, he said.

Turcan said there is no way to determine how long it will take for the saltwater to reach the Government Street well, which is located near the Government Street branch post office.

"I hope we can get the model completed before it does," he said.

There probably will be enough time to complete the model and to take action on relocating the Government Street wells, Turcan said.

"But we shouldn't try to predict Mother Nature," he added.

In general, the ground water is believed to be moving rather slowly, according to Turcan, who said the movement is probably less than a foot per day.

That movement is increased by industrial pumping, but most industries don't have wells in the 1,500-foot sand because there has always been something of a "gentleman's agreement" that the sand would be reserved for Baton Rouge drinking water.

Baton Rouge also has wells in a 2,000-foot sand, he said.

Turcan said it would be July before the modeling could be started, and the commission probably will have to receive state or federal help in financing the project.

Peters said the water works probably would wait for information on the speed of the saltwater movement before making a decision about drilling new wells.