



MIKE PENPRASE / NEWS-LEADER

Health inspector Janet Hicks takes a well-water sample after a Greene County resident requested a test.

County adds environment 'report card'

Annual study will allow officials to track progress in air and water quality.

By **Mike Penprase**
NEWS-LEADER

When a coalition of Greene County officials early this year released a report on the health of the area's environment, they realized it wasn't final.

And it never will be, according to their plan to annually release an environmental "report card" that will use expanded testing and public input to monitor, in the long term, such factors as water quality, community health, urban sprawl and air quality.



Lucks

"This has been an exciting process; this is really just the beginning of it," Environmental Collaborative chair Barbara Lucks said. "The next phase is going to be the head-scratching part of it. We're going to start addressing some of those issues."

The 36-page "State of the Environment for Springfield and Greene County" gives the area generally good marks. The document, based on 18 months of study using a national assessment plan, is the first issued in Missouri.

But more information is needed to help the county see what the biggest threats, and biggest successes, are.

"The whole idea is to identify these indicators and begin to monitor them for immediate concerns and for trends," Lucks said. "Sometimes it takes time to establish a trend."

A variety of local, state and federal agencies and organizations will contribute information, she said.

"We'll collect all of those reports and give it to the public in a comprehensive, easy-to-understand form," she said.

The public will be asked to contribute, too. The Springfield-Greene County Environmental Advisory Board will hold an open house Tuesday at the Discovery Center to explain the report. County residents will have an opportunity to comment and respond to a survey asking for their views on the county's environment.

"We're trying to get a feel from the community on what environmental is-

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'This is a national problem and Greene County is not immune ...'

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sues they feel are most important and crucial in Greene County," said Clay Goddard, community-environmental health planner for the health department.

ENSURING WATER QUALITY

Last week, 200 people spent an evening in a school gymnasium discussing their well problems in the Pleasant View area north of Springfield.

Neighborhood resident Elizabeth Turner said she'll be at Tuesday's meeting.

Turner is involved in a residents' task force studying why well levels seem to be dropping and what to do about it.

She said it's time to move from general concern over groundwater depletion to a records-based determination of how much water is being drawn.

"Unfortunately, the reason it's general is there hasn't been a lot of studying," she said. "But it looks like we're getting down to it."

The Pleasant View meeting shows the need to act before problems increase, Watershed Committee of the Ozarks development coordinator Adam Coulter said.

Coulter briefed residents on one summer of monitoring area wells, and said the committee will need to continue the effort for three to five years to get an accurate indication of what is happening to the groundwater supply.

"If they learn more about it, people might rise up and start to say something. This is a national problem and Greene County is not immune to it. As a result, I think people are going to pay more attention to their drinking water and their groundwater."

Concern about surface water quality in the county's streams and rivers is another example of how immediate and long-range efforts converge.

The report states that surface-water quality in the Ozarks generally is excellent compared with other parts of the United States. But it warns that population growth in Greene County could pose problems.

That concern became a reali-

State of the Environment

From testing well and air quality for substances such as ozone to tracking the loss of farmland in Greene County to urbanization, information from a variety of organizations has been compiled in the "State of the Environment for Springfield and Greene County." Plans call for issuing yearly updates on what's described as a benchmark report.

Greene County well testing

	Safe	Unsafe	Questionable
1990	57%	32%	11%
1991	62%	28%	10%
1992	65%	28%	7%
1993	56%	42%	2%
1994	65%	33%	2%
1995	57%	42%	1%
1996	64%	35%	1%
1997	51%	38%	1%
1998	58%	41%	1%
1999	58%	41%	1%
2000	58%	42%	0%
2001	58%	41%	0%

Recycling tonnage

	1999	2000	2001
	3,274.17 tons	3,260.95 tons	3,397.68 tons

Greene County ozone levels (parts per million)

1996	0.095
1997	0.084
1998	0.094
1999	0.095
2000	0.092
2001	0.091
5 year mean	0.091
EPA standard	0.120

Greene County urbanization

	Actual decrease in farms	Percent decrease in farms	Percent decrease in farm acreage	Actual decrease in farm acreage
1900-1997	2,323	53.8%	91,978	24.9%
1987-1997	235	10.5%	12,502	4.3%

SOURCE: GREENE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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ty during the summer when the Springfield-Greene County Health Department began sampling for bacteria and chemicals in county streams and issued a countywide advisory against whole-body contact.

But department employees say one summer's testing isn't enough to reach any conclusions and plan to continue monitoring.

EMPIRICAL LAPSES

Lack of data blurs the picture in other areas. For example, the health department has found that around 40 percent of the wells it tests each year are contaminated with bacteria or chemicals.

But that figure might be overstating the number of suspect wells, health inspector Janet Hicks said Friday during a round of visits to homes to get water samples for testing.

"A lot of our tests are requested because people suspect they have a problem, so they tend more toward the bad," she said.

And while the department has been taking samples for years, data is hard to compile because some records are on outmoded computer programs, she said.

UNVEILING INFORMATION

Officials hope the report card tells citizens, as well as officials, how they are doing when it comes to preserving the environment. They want to track the disposal of hazardous household waste, recycling and fertilizer use, for example.

Over-applying lawn fertilizers can cause a variety of problems, including the contamination of wells, said county Emergency Management director Joye McElwee.

McElwee noted how the events

Public meeting

Tuesday's meeting to get public comment on Greene County's environmental report card runs from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Discovery Center, 438 St. Louis Street.

After an overview of the county's environmental health, specialists in various areas will be available to answer questions.

Although participants will be asked to fill out surveys indicating concerns they have about environmental and community health issues, surveys will be collected through Dec. 31, Health Department community-environmental health planner Clay Goddard said.

People can request surveys by calling him at 864-1408 or via e-mail at health@ci.springfield.mo.us.

Results of the survey should be released in February, he said.

of Sept. 11 made the threat of bioterrorism very real to people. He wants other threats to be taken just as seriously.

"We're actually committing the same problem against ourselves by the way we live, and we do not respect our actions in what we're doing, and we can actually contaminate a well biologically," he said. "You can turn that around and say we're unintentionally conducting bioterrorism against ourselves."



McElwee