City of Los Banos
At the Crossroads of California

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City begins testing for Hexavalent Chromium

LOS BANOS, CA — July 18, 2025 In 2014, the State of California adopted a new drinking water regulation limiting the amount of hexavalent chromium in drinking water. That regulation was challenged in court and ultimately rescinded in 2017.

On June 16, 2023, the State again proposed a regulation limiting the amount of hexavalent chromium in drinking water. That regulation went into effect October 1, 2024. The new regulation limits hexavalent chromium in drinking water to 10 parts per billion (ppb), the same level set in 2014. This new standard is ten times lower than the current national standard and 5 times lower than the previous California standard. The groundwater aquifer that the City of Los Banos and several neighboring utilities use to supply drinking water contains naturally occurring hexavalent chromium at levels which, while they comply with the national standard set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), they exceed the new, more stringent California standard. The hexavalent chromium in the groundwater aquifer is the result of the erosion of rock formations in the region, and is not the result of an industrial discharge.

Testing is required quarterly under the new regulations. “The City completed its first round of testing in March 2025. While the results of those tests did not require mandatory community notification, June testing shows an exceedance of the running annual average maximum contaminant level, making notifications mandatory. You will be receiving those notifications in the mail in the next few days. While we are required by State Water Resources Control Board regulations to provide public notice when the water supply exceeds the maximum contaminant level for hexavalent chromium, it is important to note that the City is not yet in violation of the maximum contaminant level under the terms and conditions of the regulations.” – Interim City Manager, Gary Brizzee

It is important to emphasize: this is **NOT** an emergency, and the State is **NOT** recommending that residents use bottled water. The City is committed to complying with this new standard and has already started taking steps to identify a solution to the problem while looking for ways to limit the impact to water rates.

"We understand that water quality is a top concern for our community. I want to personally reassure every resident that your safety and well-being are our highest priority. While this new regulation presents challenges, we are fully committed to meeting these standards and keeping you informed every step of the way. Together, we will work through this process responsibly and transparently, ensuring a healthy future for Los Banos." -Mayor Michael S. Amabile

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The City is currently developing a Compliance Plan that will be submitted to, and approved by, the State Water Resources Control Board. That plan will be structured to balance the desire for a quick solution to the problem, with the City's fiscal responsibility to minimize rate impacts to water users because it is likely that all thirteen of the City's supply wells will need to be treated to remove the hexavalent chromium from the water. It is anticipated that the Compliance Plan will be broken out into three phases:

1. Phase 1 of the plan will involve testing the proposed treatment process to confirm that it is effective, reliable, and cost-effective relative to the competing processes. This is our current task.
2. Phase 2 will involve design of as many as thirteen treatment plants to treat all of the City's wells.
3. Phase 3 will involve constructing and starting up the treatment plants.

Completing these steps will take time. The regulations setting the maximum contaminant level did not take into account the number of wells that might be impacted or the associated high costs of treatment needed to achieve the level. Due to the need to treat potentially all thirteen of our wells, constituting our entire water supply, the City anticipates that it will need until late-2028 to comply with the new regulation.

Moving forward, customers can also expect to see future quarterly notifications with their utility bills every time our hexavalent chromium levels are found to exceed the maximum contaminant level.

In the meantime, the City has created a resource page for our residents that contains information regarding hexavalent chromium. That page can be found here: https://losbanos.org/important-water-issues/

If you have a question or comment, email us at: hex.chromquestions@losbanos.org or contact Public Works Operations Manager Randy Williamson at (209) 827 2469.