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A RISING STAR

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WEATHER

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Local water facilities secure

■ Little change in operations seen with alert increase

By PAULINE SCHREIBER
 Staff Writer

FARIBAULT — The country being on high alert for terrorist activities hasn't meant any extra security measures at the local level.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the city has taken extra measures to protect its water supply, said Dennis Duchene, superintendent of Faribault's water department. So the recent elevation of the national alert level had little impact.

"Basically, being on high-alert status hasn't meant that much different to our operation," Duchene said. "All our buildings have security alarms and are routinely checked during the day. The police routinely patrol the facilities at night."

Cities are being required by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to perform a vulnerability assessment of their water systems over the coming year, said Faribault Public Works Director Dave Simons.

"Doing the report should help us determine if there are more measures we can take to protect our water supply," he said.

All of the city's east-side water storage facilities are fenced and a new 2 million gallon above-ground water storage tank has a motion-detector alarm, Simons said.

Planning for disasters

Being on high alert nationwide "really hasn't meant doing things here that much differently, as far as emergency preparedness," said Mike Monge, Faribault's director of fire and code services. He also serves as the city's director of emergency management.

Monge keeps in routine contact with Faribault Police Chief Mike Lewis and City Administrator Tim Madigan, no matter what the alert status, and is in periodic contact with Rice County Emergency Services Director Rick Rabeneck.

Monge supports the idea of families creating their own emergency disaster kits, but says they needn't be expensive.

"Buying one off the Internet can be spendy. You can create one yourself for less cost and it can be available for when bad weather hits and when the power might be out."

The most vital items in the kit include a battery-powered radio and extra batteries; flashlights with extra batteries; a first-aid kit; a supply of food that doesn't require cooking; water; bleach; a fire extinguisher; blankets; and any other item you can think of that a family might need to get by for several days without power.

Having a plan for contacting family members in disaster situation "is a good plan to have worked out," Monge said.

"Mostly, disaster planning is using good common sense," he said. "So that means having a survival kit on hand."



Dennis Duchene, superintendent of Faribault's water department, left, and foreman Jim Hausen look inside the water reservoir at the Faribault Water Works Station on Monday. Behind them are the chemical feed building and the pumping station. (Kelli Wencil / Daily News)

City reservoir's condition good, report says

■ Repairs will cost less than officials expected

By PAULINE SCHREIBER
 Staff Writer

FARIBAULT — Bringing good news to Faribault in these tight budget times, an inspection of the city's 60-year-old, 1 million gallon storage tank confirmed it can be repaired for a relatively small cost.

The city hired AEC Engineering Co. to inspect the water reservoir, which is located near the city's water treatment plant.

"The report found the tank is still in good condition structurally, which means that no substantial repair or rehabilitation is needed at this time, which is good news," said Faribault Director of Engineering Tim Murray.

For a cost of between \$75,000 and \$100,000, the city can make the improvements recommended by the engineering firm. The most significant of the repairs will be recoating the roof for waterproofing and painting the exterior walls of the water reservoir. A new ladder will also be installed on the tank to meet modern safety codes, said Dennis Duchene, superintendent of Faribault's water department.

"The tank must have been built very well to begin with, because for a 60-year-old tank, it was found to be in very good shape," Duchene said.

The tank's purpose is to hold water pumped from the city's six wells, so that it can be treated with chlorine before being pumped to east-side storage tanks.

Repairs are scheduled for completion by early May, well before the peak water-

demand season. Money to pay for the project will come from the water/sewer enterprise fund, which draws its cash for water and sewer fees put aside for capital improvements.

"It's good news that repairs will only require \$75,000 to \$100,000 because we had thought they might require as much as a quarter million," said Faribault Public Works Director Dave Simons.

Last year, the city spent \$978,000 to build a new 2 million gallon water reservoir at Parshall Street and St. Paul Road. The new water reservoir has been in use since December. It is intended to replace the smaller of two existing water storage tanks built sometime in the 1930s and 1940s at that location. However, before the 1 million gallon tank is demolished, the city plans to rehabilitate the larger, 60-year-old water reservoir next to it.

"At this time, rehabilitation of that tank is planned for 2004. Until that work is done, the older 1 million gallon tank off Parshall will be kept on line to make sure we have enough water storage during the time when the older 2 million gallon tank is rehabilitated," Murray said.

At this point in time, Duchene said, the city has the capacity to store 6 million gallons of water. That includes the water tower the city built in 1997 at a cost of \$278,000. At that time, it also installed a booster station at a cost of \$105,000 to create a high-pressure zone on the city's east side. Before that was done, some east-side water users complained of very low water pressure.

"As the city grows, we have to make sure our water system grows, too," Duchene said.

Transportation issues key in school budget discussions

By JON MINNICK
 Staff Writer

FARIBAULT — School transportation remained a primary topic of discussion Monday as the Faribault School Board held another public meeting on the 2003-2004 budget.

Monday night marked the first reading of the budget proposal, which will have to reduce spending in the wake of a failed referendum last November. For weeks, school officials and board members have been working on ways to cut \$1.6 million in expenses.

"We don't have to make a decision tonight," Superintendent Keith Dixon said. "We have another reading in a week."

District administrators and school officials brought another week's worth of proposed modifications and recommendations before the board, providing updates on problem issues.

Much of the meeting was spent informing the board of its options. Principals from district schools discussed their recommendations, attempting to provide the board with the reasoning behind those recommendations.

"Right now, I need to know if the

"Right now, in essence, it's a two-mile (boundary) for secondary students and a one-mile (boundary) for elementary students."

— Superintendent of Schools Keith Dixon



options you have make sense," said Lyle Turtle, principal of Faribault High School.

The first reading involved some changes to the initial proposal. Dixon introduced a recommended change in the transportation budget that was presented at a Feb. 18 meeting. At that time, Dixon recommended that the transportation eligibility boundary be bumped back from a one-mile to a two-mile radius around each school building, with the exception of kindergarten to fifth grade students affected by pedestrian hazards.

Last night, Dixon recommended that the boundary be bumped back to two miles only for sixth to 12th grade students, and remain at one mile for kindergarten to

fifth grade.

"Right now, in essence, it's a two-mile (boundary) for secondary students and a one-mile (boundary) for elementary students," Dixon said.

Board member Jay Treadway said he was concerned about another proposed transportation change. Under the proposed change, rural students being bused to the Nerstrand Charter School would first be taken to Faribault to switch buses before being bused back to Nerstrand.

"These students may have older siblings that go to other schools," Treadway said. These students "may be inclined" to attend schools in the Northfield or Kenyon districts rather than deal with the trans-

portation change. If so, the enrollment loss would have a direct translation in the school's state-provided per-pupil funding.

The board also discussed the fate of Faribault High School's gymnastics team. Particularly at issue is the approximately \$8,000 the district pays for the team to practice at the Faribault Gymnastics Club's facility. Activities Director Ken Hubert recommended using the Faribault Middle School or another district facility for team practices.

"Putting it back at the middle school causes so many problems," board member Lisa Burkhardtmeier said. "We aren't to the point that we're cutting sports. Why are we not being equitable to gymnastics?"

FHS Principal Lyle Turtle and Assistant Principal Dennis Germann presented their final three plans for possible budget reductions at the high school. The plans were distinguished by how each would deal with the WSA program. One plan completely cut WSA, another kept it with no changes, and a third reduced its budget by one-fifth.

The board will hold a work session next Monday, March 3, to finalize the budget proposal.

Gasoline spill forces evacuation in St. Cloud

ST. CLOUD, Minn. (AP) — An estimated 1,160 gallons of gasoline spilled onto the ground and into the storm sewer system on the west side of St. Cloud on Monday, prompting the evacuation of several businesses.

No injuries were reported as fire officials estimated about 660 gallons flowed from First Fuel Bank into the storm sewer system. Firefighters used absorbent pads and pumps to stop the gas from spreading further into the sewer system and the Sauk River.

A driver, who has worked for the company for 17 years, was filling a tanker from the station's

underground tank when it overflowed, said Jim Feneis, president of the company that owns First Fuel Banks.

The gas was being pumped at about 275 gallons per minute.

"This is as serious a spill can be if you're not paying attention," Feneis said. "We're just sick to our stomach. We're still in total amazement on how this could possibly happen."

When firefighters arrived at the scene shortly after 10:30 a.m., gas was spewing from an open valve. Firefighters and First Fuel emergency crews worked for almost six hours to clean up the mess.

Employees were evacuated from the St. Cloud Times newspaper about a block away, as well as neighboring Granite Electronics, and the Electrolux freezer plant, which has almost 1,900 employees over three shifts. Much of the street was blocked off.

By late afternoon, employees were allowed to return to work.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency responded to the scene. Booms and absorbent pads placed at the river's entrance and further downstream will remain for several days, said St. Cloud Fire Chief Bill Mund.

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