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Union City water in compliance with safety regulations

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UNION CITY — Union City's drinking water no longer is in violation of federal safety standards.

For the past several years, the borough's municipal authority has struggled with keeping the level of potentially harmful disinfection byproducts from exceeding the minimum limits allowed by law. DPBs are formed when the water is treated with chlorine to eliminate bacteria.

The authority since 2009 has been operating under a consent order agreement with the state Department of Environmental Protection to ensure the borough's drinking water complies with safety standards. Levels of a DBP known as haloacetic acids and a second chemical byproduct known as trihalomethane have repeatedly exceeded government standards over the past couple of years.

But Municipal Authority Operations Manager said the borough's water supply, which comes solely from the Union City Reservoir, is passing all its recent tests.

The most-recent test results show that the borough's drinking water has met government standards for the fourth quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 12, Brumagin said.

◀ See Water, P.2

"This is great news for the community," he said. "It looks like, according to our recent test results for January and February, that we will also be in compliance with the second quarter testing for 2012."

The EPA's standard for haloacetic acids, which are formed when water is disinfected with chlorine, is an average of 60 parts per billion for any four quarterly tests. The borough's running annual average for the fourth quarter of last year was 55.3 ppb. For the first quarter of 2012, the running annual average showed even better results, at 45.6 ppb.

The EPA's standard for trihalomethane, or TTHM, is 80 ppb. Test results from the last quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012 showed TTHM levels at 62.5 ppb and 60.4 ppb, respectively.

"Due to several process control changes at the water plant, the authority was able to get into compliance with the disinfection byproducts regulations," Brumagin said.

Brumagin cited several reasons for the improvement of Union City's water.

The authority has "slowed" the daily water flow at the treatment plant along Route 6 near the reservoir from 1.2 million gallons a day to 864,000 gallons.

By slowing the plant down, the water now spends more time in contact with chlorine.

"The more contact time, the less chlorine residual," Brumagin said. "That lowers the disinfection byproducts."

The authority also cleaned its water filter media at the plant and is using a variable frequency drive on its pump that provides a more consistent flow of water from the reservoir to the treatment plant.

A major project is under way at the treatment plant and reservoir that the authority hopes will finally cure the borough's water issues.

A new raw-water conveyance line that will transport water from the reservoir to the treatment plant is nearly in place. The line is replacing a 77-

year-water line that has deteriorated over the years.

A new 650,000-gallon "north" water storage tank also is being constructed to replace a 500,000-gallon water-storage tank that was built in 1953.

These improvements are only the first phase of a long-term project that is expected to take several years to complete. The new water line and storage tank are expected to be complete by June 30.

The first phase of the project is being financed in part by a \$943,532 state H2O Grant. The municipal authority must assume the remaining \$636,468, with costs being passed on to water customers in the form of higher rates.

Brumagin said the borough's water customers can expect to see a 25 percent increase in the water bills in May. For average customers who use 5,000 gallons of water per month, their monthly water bill will rise by about \$7, Brumagin said.

An additional 25 percent increase is expected to go into effect in 2013.