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ADEQ Program to Remove Abandoned Underground Storage Tanks Gaining Popularity

By Steve Owens, Director, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality

Anyone who has driven through small cities and towns throughout Arizona is familiar with the site of boarded up gasoline stations along main thoroughfares of these communities.

In addition to being ugly distractions, these abandoned properties also may pose significant obstacles to economic redevelopment because very few business people want to take a chance on buying and developing property with an old underground storage tank.

To address this concern, we at the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality are working hard to get the word out about the Municipal Tank Closure and Corrective Action Program, a state fund that assists property owners and small communities with the removal of abandoned underground storage tanks.

The Municipal Tank Closure and Corrective Action law authorizes ADEQ to pay for the removal and clean up of abandoned tanks in communities of fewer than 15,000 residents. Storage tanks found at older dry cleaning establishments, automotive repair shops, paint stores and other facilities with abandoned tanks are also eligible for this program.

Since Governor Napolitano appointed me ADEQ Director earlier this year, I have traveled the state to tell community leaders about this terrific program as part of the department's efforts to assist Arizona's rural communities. Thus far, we have removed more than 37 abandoned tanks from eight communities including Buckeye, Clarkdale, Holbrook, Springerville, St Johns, Wilcox, Williams, and Winslow, and the list continues to grow.

The program is valuable to property owners, municipalities and the public. By helping put idle properties back into productive use, the value of the property is increased; communities are revitalized; and public health and the environment are protected.

The application process for the program is fairly straightforward. Best of all, it requires no out-of-pocket expenses for property owners or towns that file applications.

Those who want to use this program to have abandoned tanks removed must contact their local city or town manager, who will complete the application and forward it to ADEQ for an eligibility review. Because the program is limited to the removal of tanks that have been abandoned, meaning that the tank owner cannot be found, ADEQ will determine whether the tank qualifies. Provided the current property owner did not fill or operate the tank, it would qualify for state-funded removal and cleanup.

Once approved, ADEQ assigns a state-approved contractor to remove the tanks and clean up any contamination.

To date, the program has spent approximately \$260,000 to assist property owners and municipalities with tank removal and cleanup projects.

Like all good things, this program will one day end. Funding that was provided by a one-time allocation to carry out the work eventually will run out. At the moment, there are still ample funds available to remove tanks in communities throughout rural Arizona.

To take advantage of this program, to find out which cities and towns are eligible, or to receive an application, please contact ADEQ's Underground Storage Tank Program at (800) 234-5677, ext. 4268 or send an email to the program's customer service representative at johnson.allen@ev.state.az.us.