

Northern Arapaho Utilities Program

By Donovan Antelope

The Northern Arapaho Utilities Program is responsible for ensuring that communities on the Wind River Indian Reservation have clean drinking water and that they are hooked into the water and waste systems on the reservation. The Utilities Program also has a weatherization and maintenance program and they have an environmental health technician on site.

The Utilities Program maintains the water and waste systems for both the Ethete and Arapaho areas on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Their goal is to ensure that both communities have safe drinking water and that they have sanitary waste systems. They strive for these goals by making sure that drinking water in both areas doesn't come into contact with any type of contamination and that there is no discharge from the waste systems that may leak into the rivers or the groundwater systems. The Utilities Program follows the Environmental Protection Agency's guidelines for the Safe Drinking Water Act to ensure that the drinking water on the reservation is as safe as possible. In maintaining the waste systems for the reservation, Utilities also abides by the EPA's Clean Water Act to keep any waste system on the reservation from leaking or discharging and potentially contaminating the reservation's drinking water. The Ethete area is on a surface water system, which means that their drinking water comes from the Little Wind River and the Arapaho Area is on a ground water system meaning that their water comes from deep water wells.

The Utilities office is also responsible for installing and maintaining waste systems, septic tanks, water wells and waste fills for homes on the reservation. If a tribal member has a new home site and they have contacted the Utilities Program, then Utilities will make sure that home will be hooked up to the water and waste systems. But if they are in an area where they cannot be hooked into the community water and waste systems, then they will have a water well installed

along with a septic tank as well. Their office also repairs water, main, and service line breaks or ruptures.

For the installation and maintenance of any sanitation and water facilities, the Utilities Program has a Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) program. This program is actually the one responsible for the installation and construction of waste management facilities such as septic tanks, drain fills and other forms of waste storage. They also provide the services to hook new homes onto the water systems in Ethete or Arapaho. One of their engineers, Jola Wallowing Bull, provides the inspections of the water and waste systems to insure that they are being correctly installed and that they meet specific standards and guidelines.

Any member of a federally-recognized tribe, band or group is eligible for the services that SFC provides. Eligible homes are all 24-hour year-round dwellings and must be the primary residence and new to the owner. Existing homes may be eligible to be served with SDS funds, and new homes (such as non-HUD funded homes), like-new homes, and homes of referred patients with medical conditions are also eligible for regular support funds. All homes must be structurally sound.

The Utilities Program also has the Weatherization and Maintenance Program under their roof. The Weatherization program used to be part of the Northern Arapaho Nation Department of Social Services but was moved under the supervision of the Utilities Program. The Weatherization program is responsible for helping homes become more energy efficient by installing storm windows, replacing insulation, sealing cracks and winterizing water pipes. By weatherizing homes, they are helping tribal members save money with heating and cooling by keeping the heat or cool air from leaking out; and, during the winter, keeping the cold air from leaking in and making the heaters work non-stop and wasting energy. They do this by sealing cracks around door frames, sealing or installing new storm windows, blowing insulation into walls or, in the case of most trailer homes, they replace insulation under the trailers. For the winter, to help keep water pipes from

freezing and bursting, they winterize those pipes by wrapping them with insulation wrap.

The Maintenance part of the program used to be called Public Works but was re-named to Maintenance. The Maintenance program is responsible for repair and remodeling of homes of tribal members on the reservation. They build handicap ramps for homes, install walk-in showers for elders or the handicapped, repair roofs, walls, and various other home repairs or remodels. Right now, due to limited funding, the Maintenance program is only able to provide service to 31 homes on the reservation until new funding is available this fall. They are still taking applications to service 31 more homes after they receive more funding. The maintenance program also provides water line repair if a water line in a home either bursts or freezes. They also provide water heater repair and replacement for tribal members' homes on the reservation.

Lionel Bell has taken over the role of the Environmental Health Technician. He replaces Delco Whiteman, who resigned from the position. Bell and has been familiarizing himself with the many roles and duties for which the EHT is responsible. As the EHT, Lionel is responsible for safety inspections for buildings and homes on the reservation, food service inspections, animal control, vector control, and other health aspects.

He is also the safety officer for the Utilities office and provides the Utilities workers with hard hats, gloves, safety goggles, reflective safety vests and other supplies the workers may need.

Lionel also provides the child safety seats for families on the reservation who do not have any or cannot afford to purchase them. Any tribal member can request a safety seat from Lionel. If they come to the Utilities Office, he will instruct the parents or guardians on how to properly install a child's safety seat into a vehicle by installing a seat, then removing it and seeing if the adults can do it after showing them how. The seats do not cost anything and are available for any parents or guardians of small children.

As animal and vector control, Lionel is responsible for removing unwanted stray dogs and cats from properties and transporting them to the no-kill animal shelter in Fort Washakie. If a tribal member should find either a snake or a snake den on their property, they can call the EHT to come and remove the snake or destroy the den. Vector control deals with bats, insects, or unwanted pests such as rats and mice. The EHT will get rid of bats and their nests since bats are carriers of the rabies disease and will try to rid a home of rats and mice as much as possible since rats and mice can carry various types of diseases.

With warm weather approaching, Lionel has been busy training for West Nile Virus prevention. He has attended a couple of training seminars designed to help EHT workers identify the specific type of mosquito that carries the West Nile Virus. Soon, Lionel will be testing lagoons, swamps and other standing water bodies for the virus-carrying mosquito. Should he find a water body that the mosquitoes are using as a breeding ground, he will treat the water with a pesticide designed to eliminate the mosquitoes. For increased protection against the virus and mosquitoes, sometime in mid-May Lionel will also begin spraying the mosquito fogger that Riverton and Lander use to control the mosquito population.

Last year the West Nile Virus hit Fremont County and the reservation hard last year and some reservation members are still recovering from the effects of the virus. Lionel is hoping to be able to better prevent the spread of the virus this year by more frequent sprayings and finding and identifying mosquito breeding grounds.

Since taking the helm of EHT, Lionel has been busy familiarizing himself with all the material and training information that an EHT needs to know to effectively do the job. Lionel's main goal is to promote health and safety on the reservation.

The Northern Arapaho Utilities offer many services to our tribe, and any member that may be in need of these services can contact the NA Utilities program to determine the services for which they may be eligible.