



NEWS

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Coeur d'Alene Company to License UI Process To Remove Arsenic, Phosphorus From Water Systems

MOSCOW – Some 200 Idaho communities that need to reduce arsenic levels in their drinking water could benefit from a University of Idaho technology that a Coeur d'Alene firm plans to bring to market in coming months.

Blue Water Technologies signed a licensing agreement with the Idaho Research Foundation Tuesday, Aug. 5, on the UI Moscow campus to develop and market the Vandal-Ion process.

"We are excited to have an Idaho start-up company as the licensee of this University of Idaho technology," said Gene Merrell, UI chief technology transfer officer. "The principals have a track record as successful entrepreneurs, and we expect the regional economy to benefit from their activity."

Hundreds more communities throughout the U.S. are expected to find the new water treatment technology attractive to comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state drinking and waste water regulations.

The technology, which can be adapted to reduce arsenic in drinking water or to reduce phosphorus in wastewater to trace levels, was developed by Greg Möller. He is an associate professor of environmental chemistry and toxicology in the UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Möller receives funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

John Shovic, Blue Water Technologies co-founder and chief executive officer, said testing shows 200 Idaho drinking water systems must reduce current arsenic concentrations to comply with new federal regulations.

"We see ourselves becoming a major player in arsenic removal from drinking water and removing phosphorus from wastewater," he said. "This is the most cost-effective process available for removing these contaminants from water."

"What makes us so excited about this agreement is the university has done a great job in devising a very efficient and cost-effective system," said Shovic, a UI alumnus who earned a doctorate in electrical engineering.

Möller and Remy Newcombe, who earned her doctorate from UI this spring, conducted successful testing of the Vandal-Ion technology at Fruitland, Idaho, over the past year. She now serves as Blue Water's chief technology officer.

Further testing is planned on community drinking water systems to remove arsenic and on Moscow's wastewater treatment plant to reduce phosphorus levels in wastewater, Möller said.

The company will take a novel tack in developing and marketing the water treatment technology. In addition to the traditional 'built-in-place' treatment plants, Shovic said, Blue Water will offer mobile treatment plants shortly after the new year begins.

The semi-truck sized units will be available for lease to communities with excessive arsenic concentrations in their drinking water supplies. Each unit will treat up to a million gallons of drinking water a day, enough to supply about 7,000 residents.

The Vandal-Ion process is the best fit for communities with populations of up to 30,000 residents and scales well to larger systems, Shovic said.

The company will be able to respond with the mobile treatment units within months to requests, rather than the years it can take to engineer and finding-funding for a conventional water treatment unit, Shovic said.

Phosphorus is likely to yield a broader market than arsenic, Shovic said. Arsenic is a poison that has been linked to human cancers with chronic exposure at very low concentrations. Phosphorus stimulates algae growth and can cause serious water quality problems in streams and lakes.

Nationwide, about 10 percent of drinking water systems need an arsenic removal process, Shovic said, estimating that up to 50 percent of wastewater systems will need a phosphorus treatment system.