

## **ALBANY COUNTY CLEAN WATER ADVOCATES ASK COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TO PROTECT DRINKING WATER**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Albany County Clean Water Advocates (ACCWA) are pressing the Albany County Commissioners to enforce Albany County's zoning regulations regarding the former Tumbleweed Express, now called AKAL Travel Center, which is located in the aquifer protection zone.

The Aquifer Protection Overlay Zone (APOZ) is a small area, less than 2% of the county, where the aquifer is highly vulnerable to contamination.

"Any community in America or in the world, for that matter, would give their eyeteeth to have the kind of water supply we have," said Sarah Gorin, ACCWA president. "Clean water is at the core of our quality of life and serves as the foundation for economic development."

"Albany County residents have put a huge amount of effort into establishing the Casper Aquifer Protection Plans and the regulations that implement them over the last twenty years," Gorin said. "If these regulations are going to mean anything, they must be followed, not undermined by the inaction of county officials."

The APOZ was established by Albany County in 2003 after substantial community involvement and the approval of elected officials at both the county and city levels. "Even back then, the Casper Aquifer Protection Plan identified Tumbleweed as a 'high priority threat' to our groundwater, because of the potential for contamination from leaks or spills," said Gorin. "That's why the current regulations for the aquifer protection zone prohibit gas stations and any other land uses involving hazardous materials."

"Contamination is not some improbable event," Gorin said. "AKAL has been cited and fined by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality at another of its stations for leaving dipsticks in their fuel storage tanks that would keep the overfill prevention devices from working."

"After being cited, AKAL fixed the problem, but it illustrates the kind of human error that can circumvent even the most well-engineered monitoring system and cause pollution. That's why allowing gas stations over your drinking water source is not a good idea."

"The Wyoming Constitution says the waters of the state belong to the people," said Nancy Sindelar, ACCWA Vice-President. "Any damage to this resource harms all of us, as clean, safe water is a necessity of life as well as for everything else we do and enjoy."

The zoning exception (referred to as “grandfathering”) that allowed Tumbleweed to continue operating after enactment of the aquifer protection zone required the gas station to remain in continuous operation.

According to ACCWA’s October 3, 2019 letter to the Albany County Commissioners and the Albany County & Prosecuting Attorney, Tumbleweed repeatedly failed to meet the “active and continuous operation” requirement due to its erratic on-again, off-again operations and its failure to maintain licenses required to operate as a gas station.

“Albany County was on the right track earlier this year when it filed a complaint for injunction to stop the re-activation of Tumbleweed,” said Sindelar. “The mystery is why the complaint was withdrawn.”

“Zoning regulations protect our property rights. They allow us the peace of mind of knowing our neighbors will treat us with the same respect that we treat them and we won’t pollute each other,” Sindelar said.

Further, ACCWA’s letter states that even if the now-prohibited use as a gas station is grandfathered, the Albany County Commissioners have not followed the regulatory process to approve or disapprove an expansion of the facility.

“ACCWA has made several requests for documents from the county, and these show that county officials characterized AKAL’s activities at Tumbleweed as an expansion,” Gorin said. “Since they made that determination, ACCWA is asking that the county follow the established expansion process, which requires the approval or disapproval of the County Commissioners.”

The letter, which makes clear that ACCWA is considering its legal options, calls upon the Albany County Commissioners to vote to approve or disapprove the Tumbleweed/AKAL expansion as required by county zoning regulations.

Additional information, including an educational video and a library of documents pertaining to aquifer protection, can be found on ACCWA’s website at [albanycountycleanwateradvocates.org](http://albanycountycleanwateradvocates.org) or on Facebook.