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## 3-agency deal ends five-year well battle (view clip)

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PRINCESS ANNE -- A five-year battle over well permits for Princess Anne's public water system ended Thursday when the Somerset County Sanitary District Commission approved cooperative agreements with three state agencies.

"It's been a long five years," said Larry Tyler, chairman of the Sanitary Commission, after his board emerged from a 30-minute closed-door meeting and voted to approve the deals.

The first agreement with the Maryland Department of the Environment stipulates the county must dismiss its lawsuit against MDE once permits are issued for two wells on Revells Neck Road next to Eastern Correctional Institution.

The suit was filed last year after MDE officials refused to issue permits unless the county agreed to treat the water to reduce fluoride.

The case is scheduled to go to trial in October, so well permits are expected to be issued before then, said Robin Cockey, attorney for the Sanitary Commission.

Secretary of the Environment Shari Wilson has approved the agreement, he said.

Under the second agreement with Maryland Environmental Service and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, the Sanitary Commission will provide some of its water from the new wells to ECI.

In exchange, MES, which operates water and sewer systems at the prison, will treat Princess Anne's water with a new reverse osmosis system.

Cockey said MES had not yet signed off on an amended version of the agreement, but he had been in touch with the agency's attorneys.

"I expect it will be OK," he said.

Dawn Stolfus, a spokeswoman for MDE, said the department was waiting to see the amended agreement with MES and the prison system.

"We're very optimistic this resolves the issue," she said.

While the Sanitary Commission will be responsible for the cost of drilling the wells and constructing a water tower, the state will use federal stimulus funds for the construction of the reverse osmosis plant at ECI, said Robin Street, manager of the Sanitary District.

Since reverse osmosis is an expensive treatment method, costs to the Sanitary District will be capped so customers won't have excessive water bills, Cockey said.

In spite of the new agreements, getting the wells online is at least 18 months away, probably longer, Street said.

"The bottom line is this is not instant," he said.

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