

## Senator seeking \$20M to help Mead's recovery during, after AltEn cleanup

- [Chris Dunker](#), Oct 6, 2021

A Nebraska lawmaker is seeking \$20 million in American Rescue Plan funds to help Mead recover after a neighboring ethanol plant was determined to be the source of widespread pesticide contamination.

Sen. Bruce Bostelman of Brainard, who represents Mead and Saunders County in the Legislature, made the request to the Appropriations Committee on Tuesday.

Unlike other ethanol plants, AltEn manufactured treated seed into the fuel additive, leaving behind solid and liquid byproducts highly contaminated by neonicotinoids, a class of pesticide found to be harmful to pollinators.

The solid byproducts were [later dumped in fields across Saunders County](#), while the [wastewater frequently ran into streams that eventually flow in the Platte River near Ashland](#).

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Area residents have reported lingering health problems, and pesticides found in high concentrations at AltEn have been found at [trace levels in groundwater as far as 6 miles away](#).

A coalition of six seed companies that sent discarded treated seed to AltEn for disposal have [joined together to pay for cleanup of the site](#).

The so-called AltEn Facility Response Group is due to submit a plan for cleaning up the estimated 84,000 tons of pesticide-laden distiller's grains stockpiled at the site and 150 million gallons of contaminated wastewater by Nov. 1.

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy will then review the plan and open it up to public comment before accepting or denying it.

Bostelman said the American Rescue Plan funds would not be used to clean up AltEn; rather they would be set aside to help the people of Mead and the surrounding area.

"With any large-scale cleanup operation and loss of a major employer in an area, there are many unforeseen issues that arise that will need immediate or long-term attention," Bostelman said Tuesday.

The \$20 million request could help the village address short- or long-term economic, environmental or potential health risks that arise, he told the committee.

"Those are all things that are real and facing the community now," he said.

While the Legislature plans to appropriate the American Rescue Plan funds beginning in January, those funds must be spent by 2026 under the law passed by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden.

Bill Thorson, the chair of the Mead Board of Trustees, said those rescue plan dollars could be used to upgrade the village's water infrastructure should pesticides from the AltEn site be detected in its groundwater wells.

Mead has recently spent \$3 million on a pair of new groundwater wells, a water treatment facility and new water tower, all before the contamination at AltEn was discovered.

Thorson said while groundwater typically moves to the southeast away from Mead, the village will continue monitoring its wells for potential pesticide contamination.

Mead would look at using federal dollars to repair roads damaged by trucks hauling loads of distiller's grains away from AltEn, as well as providing assistance to local businesses.

After the hearing, Thorson said he also believes the funding could be used to help pay for long-term environmental and health testing being done by University of Nebraska and Creighton University researchers.

Earlier this year, a team from UNL and UNMC estimated it could cost as much as \$1 million per year over the next decade to monitor AltEn's lasting impact on the area.

Thorson said attention AltEn has brought to the village of less than 600 has cast it in a negative light and hurt the community's growth.

Some have likened Mead to Flint, Michigan, where lead pipes have made water undrinkable — a comparison Thorson said was unfair and had attached a negative stigma to the community.

But he believes the American Rescue Plan has provided the village an opportunity to grow beyond the reputation the ethanol plant has given Mead.

"We want to ensure the surrounding communities, businesses and landowners will not be left with the repercussions of AltEn's negligence," he told the committee.