

PANEL

Municipal Water Quality Problems and Information Needs

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I'd like to begin with an illustration of one of the problems facing an agency like ours in trying to treat water to meet the required standards and deliver potable water to its customers. Right now, State Representative Jim Gonzales, hopefully along with the news media, is out with one of my engineers looking into one of our reservoir hatches. We are doing this to prove that there are no dead dogs in the reservoir. This really does indicate the kind of problems that can occur at a very large water related agency in getting the right information to the customers and the other agencies and to get information from them in a timely manner.

Gus Cordova just mentioned trihalomethanes (THM). Concern over THM first started several years ago when a national newspaper, as well as television stations, carried the story. We were flooded with calls about whether or not our water is safe regarding THM. Since then, numerous studies have been conducted to determine THM standards and those of us who are operating systems are in agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as to what that standard should be. We're now identifying organics of all kinds. Some of the instruments used to identify these organics cannot measure to the level set by the standards.

When we ran into problems with our San Jose well no. 6, we had a communication problem of another kind. It was determined that one of our wells contained a number of organic impurities. I found out about it, however, when the news media called and said that the state Environmental Improvement Division (EID) had put out a news release stating that we had a couple of wells not meeting water quality standards. "Oh," I said, "I'll try to get a copy of the news release and have an answer for you." Since then, we've improved our communications tremendously with the EID and hopefully now we know what each other is doing. We have had to close down San Jose well no. 6, but it turned out that the other well was all right and we've continued use of it. Since then, the city Environmental Improvement Department has been sampling private wells within the city. They put out a news release this week saying that contaminants in the San Jose area were in these private wells and that the city is recommending that these individuals hook into the city system. We think we have found a solution. We went to the state and it established the standards for the identified organics in San Jose. We believe that by blending the water in this well with other wells in the reservoir, we will stay within all standards regarding water quality in the San Jose area. Of course, if we start having trouble with other wells in that area, we're in a serious mess. We will have to build more wells and that's not cheap. It costs between \$800,000 and \$2 million to fully equip a well. This brings us to the second problem we're experiencing and that is the cost of meeting liquid waste standards. We're in the process of expanding liquid waste treatment plant no. 2 in the South Valley so that we can completely close down treatment plant no. 1 and also handle the load that we foresee

in the future. The problems caused by changing the sludge treatment standard from the 60/60 standard to the 30/30 standard was anticipated by only a few engineers in the United States. The change required that sewage treatment leave only 30 parts per million suspended solids rather than the old standard of 60 parts per million. The increased removal rate leaves us with the problem of disposing of a tremendous amount of sludge. For the last five years we've been hauling sludge from the plant to various sites around the city. We are now injecting it into the South Broadway landfill. Part of our program will be to move all of the sludge handling to Montessa Park which is at least 250 feet above the water table and should not cause a problem. What we're talking about overall is a large amount of money to accomplish these programs. With the federal government drawing back, I expect to see continued rate increases unless we are able to get funds from other sources for construction and operation and maintenance costs. We're certainly looking at all kinds of revenue sources--federal and state--to do as much as we can to keep the rates down. But I had to really mention rates because that's why people don't love me!