California OKs Use of Wells with Low Dioxane Levels

Summarized from article first appearing in Water Tech ONLINE, March 8, 2002

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, CA - A key state health official has advised a group of Orange County groundwater users that there is no significant risk associated with low levels of 1,4-dioxane found in local wells.

Dr. David Spath, chief of the Division of Drinking Water and Environmental Management of the California Department of Health Services (DHS), made the determination in early March, according to the Orange County Water District (OCWD).

Spath said it would be prudent to continue to monitor the wells at a reasonable frequency, but removing the wells from service is not necessary, the OCWD said.

In January, 1,4-dioxane was discovered in nine area wells at levels ranging from 4 parts per billion (ppb) to 20 ppb. As a precaution and to ensure public confidence, cities with wells above the level of 3 ppb chose to take those wells out of service until receiving guidance from the DHS, said the district.

Spath said the state does not recommend treatment to remove the chemical at the low levels detected.

The OCWD has found no wells anywhere near the 300-ppb level, or 100 times the action level, which is the level at which the DHS recommends removing the wells from service.

Complete article: www.watertechonline.com

MTBE Ban is Delayed in CA

Summarized from article first appearing in Water Tech Online, March 18, 2002.

SACRAMENTO, CA - California Gov. Gray Davis disappointed water agencies and municipalities in the state with his largely anticipated decision to delay the ban of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE).

Davis issued an executive order on March 15th, 2002 that will allow state refineries up to 12 additional months for the transition from MTBE to ethanol. The governor had planned for the ban to commence at the end of this year, but concern about its effect on gasoline prices at the pump led to reconsideration.

Observers expected the delay, especially after a consulting firm said the ban should be held off for three years or California could face massive gasoline shortages.

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) said in a statement it "strongly disagrees" with the governor's decision.

"ACWA believes that delaying the ban by even one more day is another opportunity for MTBE to find its way into another community's water supplies. Given the choice between the continued use of MTBE or protection of our water supplies and water quality, we believe the public would put the safety of their water supply first," the group said.

Complete article: www.watertechonline.com

New Mexico Struggles with Water Well Dilemma

***Ted Montuori** – Assistant Managing Editor, WaterTechOnline. First appeared in Water Tech ONLINE, Feb. 18, 2002.*

SANTA FE, NM - An attempt to limit how much water could be pumped from domestic wells and to deny permits for new ones has died in New Mexico's state legislature. The effort to get the bill passed underscores New Mexico's struggle to conserve drinking water. Proponents of the bill said it would help the state's rivers replenish themselves. Opponents said giving the power to control wells to one person - the state engineer - would be wrong and create problems.

Rep. Joe Stell said the bill he crafted, Underground Waters Permits, would have helped limit the amount of water drawn from the approximately 130,000 wells in the state. New Mexico law says the state engineer must approve all permits for domestic wells, from which well owners can draw up to three acre-feet of water per year. The bill died January 31st in the House Agriculture and Water Resources Committee.

Reducing the amount of water drawn from wells would help replenish the state's waterways, particularly the Pecos River. Approximately 325 miles long, the Pecos River has not met its historic average flow rate in 17 of the last 20 years. This is due to a growing population, poor weather and watershed conditions, and the area's naturally arid climate, said Stell. The water is also needed as part of a 1980s compact requiring New Mexico to deliver water to Texas, after neglecting to deliver 340,000 acre feet to that state for 34 years.

State Engineer Tom Turney said the Pecos River has lost between 10 and 30 percent of its water because of the increasing amount of domestic well use. In eight years, Turney said he has issued about 140,000 permits, each costing $5, to build domestic wells.

Besides the Pecos River losing water, another pressing issue is that the permit applicants are not buying water rights, which cost between $1,000 and $2,000 per acre-foot, according to Turney.

"I think it's a flawed policy to issue permits to areas where there are water quality issues," Turney said.

If he had his way, Turney said he would cut off water from thousands of wells to illustrate his point that permit applicants need to buy water rights, which is exactly what the bill's opponents didn't want. The bill would have allowed the state engineer very broad powers in deciding who would be denied domestic well permits, said Alan

Eades, president of the New Mexico Ground Water Association (NMGWA). That decision should be made by the state's counties, which have recently been dealing with a rise in subdivisions that use wells for residents' drinking water, Eades said. Giving that power to one person would be wrong, according to Eades, who said if the law was implemented, the state engineer could anger homeowners and begin a flurry of lawsuits by turning off wells. Turney disagrees. "They need to be regulated," he said. "Someone has to have the authority to do it."

Eades said the NMGWA liked other parts of the bill, such as lowering the amount of water that can be used to one acre-foot annually and using meters to monitor usage of each well.

Stell said he thinks there will be studies done on how the domestic wells and increasing population affect the Pecos River and other waterways.

Visit www.watertechonline.com

Arizona DWR Forms Now Available Online

Well owners and those seeking to drill or modify a water well now have immediate access to the necessary forms from the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) website, www.water.az.gov/ Twelve forms and accompanying instructions are located on the "Forms" page of the website. They can be downloaded and printed with Adobe Acrobat reader.

Arizona Water Protection Fund Application Deadline Changed

The Arizona Water Protection Fund (AWPF) Commission has approved moving the due date for FY2003 Grant Applications to Wednesday, August 7 at 3 p.m. This change is due to the uncertainty of current budget discussions at the Capitol.

Should you have any questions, or if you would like an application packet, contact Rodney Held, Program Manager at (602) 417-2400 ext. 7168.

AWPF: *www.awpf.state.az.us/*
ADWR: *water.az.gov/*

EPA Toxics Release Inventory Material Available Online

EPA guidance document for facilities that must comply with the lowered reporting level of 100 pounds for lead, pursuant to the Emergency Planning Community Right-To-Know Act (EPCRA) section 313, also known as the Toxics Release Inventory, can be obtained at *www.epa.gov/tri/guide_docs*

EPA Toxics Release Inventory Form R for 2002 can be obtained at *www.epa/gov/tri/report/rfi2001.pdf*