



Pacific Water Quality Association

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Roger Briggs
Executive Officer
Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101
San Luis Obispo, CA. 93401-7906

Dear Mr. Briggs:

The Pacific Water Quality Association (PWQA) has noticed, via the November 17 “lyris” e-mail announcement, that the Central Coast RWQCB will be considering support of a Water Softener Ordinance for San Benito County (agenda item #11, Dec 1, 2011 Board meeting, Resolution No. R3-2011-0215).

We have reviewed the staff report and feel that the facts presented do not support allowing San Benito County local governments the go-ahead to enact bans on water softeners. Many PWQA members manufacture, distribute, and service water softener devices and as such we are sensitive to actions by your board that may encourage these local agencies to implement bans without exploring other methods to control salt discharge first.

PWQA was a key stakeholder in AB 1366-Feuer, 2009 which put into place the provisions of California Water Code section 13148. While 13148 (e) requires a regional board to make a finding prior to local agencies taking action, it is important to note the entire section of 13148 in which other alternatives are offered to attempt to control salinity.

PWQA would like the opportunity to become a stakeholder in this debate. The actions stemming from R3-2011-0215 will deny the citizens of San Benito County access to softeners which they use to improve their own water quality and to protect the investments in their big ticket appliances. Also, the water softener purveyors in and around San Benito County will be economically affected in that they are small businesses and franchises with a stake in the local economy.

Therefore, PWQA respectfully requests that the board postpone agenda item 11 until the next meeting. PWQA would like to meet with CCRWQCB staff and city and county officials to discuss possible alternatives to help address the region’s salinity challenges.

The water treatment industry has always recognized that the issue of brine discharge is a very real concern. We have strived to work with legislators and regulators to find meaningful and comprehensive solutions. We believe there are many effective and cost-efficient answers to the problem that also minimize the harm to consumers.

Our industry has a long record of working collaboratively to find mutually agreeable solutions. For example, PWQA is an active member of the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (CV-SALTS), the non-for-profit formed in July 2008 to develop stakeholder-based answers to the problems facing the area. An association member attends every meeting, and we work very closely with, among others, CV-SALTS Executive Director Daniel Cozad, Executive Officer Pamela Creedon and board member Karl Longley.

To regulate a product that affects people's daily quality of life in their homes is a major and serious undertaking, as you are no doubt aware. Given the competing demands for quality water and environmental protection, we believe the process should be both comprehensive and fair.

The first step should be to gather reliable information. Even after many years of public debate, there do not appear to be dependable facts even about how many residential water softeners are in use or how much they contribute to brine discharge. The figure of "10 percent" has been used, that is, about one in ten residences are said to operate softeners. However, this has largely been conjecture or anecdotal. We do not know of any methodical study that demonstrates the level of ownership with sufficient accuracy.

Nor does there appear to be reliable knowledge about what proportion of the total sewer system salinity comes from self-regenerating household water softeners. Often, the figure "five percent" is used, but, again, this does not seem to be firmly established. What is known is that self regenerating water softeners are a very minor part of the total.

If there are reliable studies, we ask that they be shared with our industry and the public generally so decisions can be made with a full understanding of the realities that are being faced. If there are no such studies, we strongly encourage that they be conducted.

After an accurate picture has been captured, the next step is to decide what are the most efficient and sensible options to comprehensively address this issue.

The exact penetration and contribution percents may turn out to be somewhat different than the 10 and 5 percent figures, respectively. However, it seems clear that the vast majority of controllable sources are not water softeners. Any solution should take into account not only water softeners but all the sources of chlorides and total dissolved solids (TDS). Reductions should be controlled from every source. For example, will water softening devices operated by governmental agencies be subjected to the same controls as those in private homes? (The enclosed fact sheets on usage show that state prisons and hospitals alone consume close to 4,000,000 pounds of salt annually.)

Over recent years, discussions between our members and many regulators and officials suggest a general consensus that outright bans may not work effectively. The Santa Clarita experience seems to confirm this. Options such as encouraging salt-saving upgrades would be less intrusive and possibly more effective than bans.

More study would be required, but one early estimate suggests that the replacement of 500,000 low efficient softeners with efficiency-rated units could save as much as two billion gallons of water and 175,000 tons of salt annually.

Finally, we ask that you consider the benefits of water softeners. Soft water is not merely a convenience in many cases. Water softeners often are an enabling technology, helping other appliances run more efficiently. Hard water significantly harms pipes and appliances, which fill

up landfills and lead to more energy consumption. The use of softened water was proven to lead to substantially lower plumbing repair costs. Clothing and household linens are harmed by hard water. The minerals in hard water act as an abrasive on clothing, causing fibers to break. Hard water can cut the life of clothing by as much as one third and linens can wear out at twice the normal rate, depending on how hard the water is.

Soft water is absolutely necessary for the operation of water heating devices, especially for the highest efficiency tankless water heaters. California is currently the biggest market for such devices and is offering incentives for homeowners to retrofit to adopt this technology. In most cases, they are not warranted by their manufacturer if the water passing through them is hard. In parts of southern California, water hardness is exceptionally high, as high as 25 grains per gallon is not unusual. Instant hot devices can provide a significant water savings for California. With a softener ban, they would be unusable in many populous parts of the state such as in the Inland Empire Utility Agencies' district.

Further it must be recognized that water softeners are effective and commonly used for reduction of lead and heavy metals, ammonia, radium, and other such health-related cationic contaminants in drinking water. Many times the use of a water softener is the most convenient and necessary way for a homeowner to afford protection from water supply health hazard contaminants. The water softener is not the only self regenerating ion exchange household water treatment device that is salt regenerated. Anion exchange resins which are almost exclusively used to remove hazardous water supply contaminants, (nitrate, perchlorate, uranium, chrome, selenium, arsenic, fluoride, etc., for example) would also be affected by a "softener" ban. There is no viable fix for many of these problems other than ion exchange and salt.

In summary, we believe that reliable data needs to be gathered. Then, the most effective and efficient comprehensive approaches should be found, with an understanding of the importance and utility of softened water. We are enclosing a "Salinity Management" booklet that discusses possible solutions, the advantages of higher efficiency softeners and other facts. You will also find other documents that further demonstrate the points made here.

Sincerely,



Marty Jesson
President, Pacific Water Quality Association

cc: Chris Adair, Senior Water Resource Control Engineer, CCRWQCB
David Loveday, Water Quality Association
Mike Mecca, Legislative Chair, PWQA
The Honorable Anthony Cannella, CA State Senate
Pete Conaty, PWQA Legislative Advocate