



## **Water Treatment**

### *Preserving Water*

#### **Winifred Robinson**

It may not look it, but East Anglia is the driest part of the UK

The total annual rainfall is equivalent to that in Jerusalem yet the local water companies have managed to preserve the water supply and avoided the imposition of Summer-time hosepipe bans.

Nevertheless, there are proposals to increase the population of this South Eastern corner of England.

And more people in the area will inevitably put pressure on the water supply.....

#### **Man 1 (Vox Pop)**

The water supply for this area is going to be sorely stretched over the next few years because of, I mean, just reading in the local papers, at how many houses are planned to be built in Essex and this area, East Anglia, and going towards Suffolk.

#### **Man 2 (Vox Pop)**

They're going to build in places where prices are good and all that does is just increase the population and if you go to Yorkshire and places like that, they've got water coming out of their ears but there's nobody, you know people don't want to live up there or the demand is so high so the profit margin is so great.

#### **Man 1 (Vox Pop)**

You know, constantly demanding more and more houses to be supplied is going to make it obviously, I mean we are normally the first to have hosepipe bans when it dry and it doesn't take them long to say, "right, nobody is allowed to use a hose", and obviously with more and more houses being built, then its going to get worse isn't it.

#### **Winifred Robinson**

Well is it. I'm joined now by a group of people, who between them are responsible for securing safe affordable drinking water in this region. First of all, Martin Lunn, he is chief scientist with Essex and Suffolk water. The company supplies part of the region, and has been involved in public consultations over new solutions to the shortage. Martin, how useful was that dialogue with the public?

#### **Martin Lunn**

I think we've found the public consultations very useful. When you try to introduce new schemes, you don't really know what the things are that concern the public. The only way you can find this out is by, go out and talk to them, and this is what we've done, and from what they've told us, we've helped to develop the schemes we're about to bring into place.

#### **Winifred Robinson**

I'm also joined by a representative of Martin's direct clients, the general public. Catherine Harvey, is chairman of the customer service committee for OFFWAT in the eastern region. Catherine I know that one of OFFWAT'S jobs is to set the prices for water, but that's not what you do is it?

#### **Catherine Harvey**

No, we are not the economic regulator, we are the customer service group. We provide information to the regulator about the customer perspective on many issues. We are routinely consulted on the issues that they are taking forward at the time. We represent all customers,

both domestic and commercial, and we have a particular interest in vulnerable customers, those that are living in water poverty, or vulnerable for other reasons.

**Winifred Robinson**

Someone else that we've brought here, is Claire Jackson, she is from the drinking water inspectorate. It's one of three regulators that are responsible for monitoring standards in water supply. Claire what would you say your main role was then?

**Claire Jackson**

Our main role is to make sure that the water that actually comes out of the tap, is of suitable quality for drinking, washing cooking purposes. We audit the water companies in England and Wales to make sure the water's wholesome, make sure it meets the regulations, if it doesn't, we would require the water companies to do something about it, and we also have powers of prosecution, if water is supplied that's unfit for human consumption.

**Winifred Robinson**

And last but of course not least, we want to consider the impact of drawing drinking water on the environment. Pauline Smith is from the environment agency. Pauline, tell us what the environment agency has to do?

**Pauline Smith**

Well our role, as you'd guess from the title is very much to protect and enhance the environment. We're doing that however within a wider context of sustainable development so, taking account of the needs of people society and, looking at the economics of things as well. How do we do it? Well, we monitor the environment in a whole host of ways, to make sure that we understand what's happening. So we measure river flows, we measure the level of water in the ground, we monitor discharges, and a whole host of other things. We then use that information to regulate abstractors and, companies that discharge water,

**Winifred Robinson**

So here we are in a part of the country that's very dry, so what can be done to redress that. Catherine, what do you think?

**Catherine Harvey**

Well there are a number of things, and certainly customers being better informed about the resource and what they can do to be efficient with it, and metering obviously helps in that. But one of the big things from our perspective, is that, water companies are not statutory consultees in the planning process. Sometimes the relationship between water companies and planning agencies is good, but it's not inevitable, and there needs to be a much closer look at the population rises and what type of houses are going into an area, and better matched with the water resources that are already there.

**Winifred Robinson**

So the idea would be to put the people where the water is?

**Catherine Harvey**

To a large extent, but that would sort of precludes that you can create more sources of water, but certainly it should be a, a very serious consideration.

**Winifred Robinson**

And what about the way we live and the kind of houses that are built, and how much water that might entail?

**Catherine Harvey**

Well the way that we're living is changing. There are an increasing number of people who are living on their own for a longer period of time, and when you have a lot of those in one area, your per capita rate of water consumption goes up, proportionately they, they use more. But certainly people need to understand, that it is not a fine, that it is a finite resource, and that they need to be mindful of it, and one of the things that inhibits being mindful, is people not being metered. You

know you're very sensitive about turning off lights because your electricity is on a meter. We don't inevitably have that sensitivity about water, because not everybody is metered.

**Winifred Robinson**

But as somebody who is meant to represent the interests of the general public, isn't it the case that many people don't want to have a meter, in fact most people don't want it?

**Catherine Harvey**

A lot of people don't want a metre, and I would respect that view, but it is also important to accept that consumers have responsibilities as well as rights, and that issues of water shortage need to be considered globally within a region, and not left entirely to the discretion of individual householders.

**Pauline Smith**

People are not generally aware that, their green lawn which may have been watered during the hot sunny summer, is at the expense of their local wetland site. That there are things like that happening, and in order to manage water resources better, we need to redress the balance, make sure that, people do understand those links, and with greater motivation, can then help us conserve water.