Water Treatment
Consulting The Public

Winifred Robinson
Catherine Harvey, what's the best sort of approach if you do want to really and truly consult people about what you plan to do with their water supplies?

Catherine Harvey
I think there probably isn't one approach that is is a perfect formula, it's a matter of doing a number of things. We know from our own recent research that, the issues people understand best, are those that have been exposed in the general media, rather than in leaflets that are included with the bill or are in libraries and so on.. So certainly from that point of view, we would say, use the general media, but it's also a matter of using, making contact with the public over a prolonged period of time. It's not just something you do mid week one week, and and leave it at that, and I think in this case the very great pity was, that at a time of a drought, there is the necessity to get people on side, and this was the total antithesis of that.

Winifred Robinson
Though I guess that if you're in a time drought, you're probably looking for a solution that you can implement pretty quickly?

Catherine Harvey
I can imagine that's the case, and I can imagine there are circumstances when, almost emergency things have to be put in place. But, it is a matter still of talking to the public, and talking to them quickly I mean. At times of crisis, water companies use vehicles with loud hailers. They put leaflets through every household doors which is what they do for “boil water” notices and so on. But that always does seem to be associated with emergency. If you are consulting with people, then you mustn't make it look like an emergency, and of course the, the information or the consultation must be thorough, doing it with a small section of the community, can be just enough to start rumours, and not have everybody reasonably informed.

Winifred Robinson
Pauline, what view would the environment agency take of this idea of trying out recycling and then consulting. Because what Martin has said is that, they put it straight back into the reservoirs, and then because of a public outcry, they're now chucking it back in the rivers again.

Pauline Smith
Yes. During the drought period, there obviously was the need to develop something very quickly. So, from a water resources management viewpoint, we were supportive of the measures the company needed to take, in the short term. The other side that we're interested in, is the impact on the environment obviously and, from the agency's perspective, the elements that come in there are, first of all the effects on the estuary where the discharge is being removed from, and then secondly the effects where it's being put instead, whether that's direct to the reservoir, or into the river.

Now from our point of view there were, possibly less issues in putting it direct into the reservoir. But our main and overriding concern is to see that in the longer term the company develop a scheme that is acceptable to everybody, and if the long term way forward is to put the water into the river, then we need to make sure that we're satisfied with the, the impacts and implications of that. So those are the, the perspectives that we look at it from.

Winifred Robinson
If less effluent is pumped into a river, does that mean that there's less water in the river for you to allow people to take out, who might want it? I'm thinking I suppose of farmers and industries.

Pauline Smith
I mean yeah exactly. I mean in this particular case, the effluent was previously being discharged downstream at the very bottom of the river into the estuary, and it was taken away from there, and put direct into the reservoir for the temporary recycling scheme. So we would be looking at the impacts, at that estuary end, of taking it away. In other instances it might be the case that the relocation of a discharge, does have quite profound effect on river flows downstream so, we always want to look at that sort of thing very carefully.