



Water Treatment

Dealing With Water Emergencies

Winifred Robinson

One solution that was put into operation at Hanningfield reservoir, in a time of drought, turned out to be highly controversial. Here's the top story in a new bulletin from 1997.

Studio Newsreader

"A water company in Essex has caused outrage after admitting that it is pumping processed sewage into the drinking water supply. 400,000 households in the south of the county are currently receiving water from a reservoir which contains up to 5% waste. The effluent is pouring into Hanningfield Reservoir near Wickford. It is then processed and pumped through the taps in the homes in Basildon, Southend and Romford.

Winifred Robinson

So Martin was it, a case then of your company, treating consumers as though they were guinea pigs, and just trying out something new on them?

Martin Lunn

No we weren't trying out something new, it wasn't particularly novel, because in the south of England, water's been reused from sewage works for over a hundred years. I think what the public didn't like, and we've now appreciated is, that we've put the water directly into the reservoir, and although that had no public health implications, it certainly had public perception implications.

Winifred Robinson

And when you say it's been done in the south of England for a long time, you mean exactly as you were doing it in that time of drought, straight back into the reservoir.

Martin Lunn

Well it's a geographical fact, that most towns are up on the upper reaches of rivers, so when they've used the water, the sewage effluent goes into the rivers, and nearly all abstraction of water is at the bottom end of rivers. So when we're taking water out of rivers anyway in the south of England, in a very dry year up to sixty percent may be treated effluent.

Winifred Robinson

Claire, you're the arbiter on all this, was that drinking water safe?

Claire Jackson

Definitely. As Martin said in the south, not just the south, in other parts of the country as well, if you're abstracting water from a lowland river, for drinking water purposes, it's going to have a percentage of sewage effluent in it, it's it's bound to. But the treatment has to be suitable to match it. And with the combination of ozone which is a very strong disinfectant as well as as very good at removing organics, at the front end of the works, and then a touch of chlorine at the back end, the disinfection process would have been more than capable of, dealing with any bacteria viruses present in the water. So, yes that water would be perfectly safe to drink.

Winifred Robinson

So Martin, if the water really was alright as Claire said, it must at the very least then, have been a failure in public relations?

Martin Lunn

I think we certainly learnt that when we came to building a permanent scheme, the public were not happy with it going directly into the reservoir. When we've actually planned the

permanent scheme, we now put the water into a river, prior to it going into the reservoir, and all the public concern seems to have evaporated.

Winifred Robinson

What did you tell them, before you started on the process that we just saw on the film?

Martin Lunn

Well I think we've learnt how to talk to the public better since then. I think what we did we informed people, we put out information, but we didn't really consult these people and I.....

Winifred Robinson

How did you put the information out, how did it reach them?

Martin Lunn

We spoke to, we put out press releases to local newspapers, and we spoke on local radio, but that was really us telling people what we were going to do, not talking, beforehand asking them what they would like us to do.