

Regulation Ideology

By Tim Tice, OAWU Groundwater Technician

Groundwater and its protection may not be thought of often for the simple reason, "Out of sight, out of mind." For the most part, ground water is a much more significant component in our daily lives than we tend to believe. Groundwater, being an important valuable hidden resource, accounts for 95% of the fresh water in Oregon. There are an approximate 300,000 wells in this state that TAP into this hidden resource on a regular basis. About 90% of the residents living in rural Oregon rely on ground water as their sole source of drinking water.

The state of Oregon, just like many other states have written and adopted laws that explain how we as citizens can maintain a level of confidence in our drinking water by following a guideline of regulations. While we remain confident that our water is not dangerous, the comfort level in supplying clean water is often shrouded in frustration and worries by those at the water system to keep up with the regulations.

Have you ever delved into the reason why we have so many regulations to follow in regard to our water? Anyone in the water business understands that simple technology, human growth in activities and life style has forced many of the regulations upon us. Early in the twentieth century the number of cases of virus based epidemics would be considered frightening in today's world if the occurrences were still rearing it ugly head.

The number of epidemics is down due to the reason that a regulation was written requiring many public water systems to disinfect the water prior to distribution, one regulation have has made a huge impact on our life styles. Many regulations are deemed ridiculous, redundant and absolutely ludicrous, but for the most part they are essential to raise the bar on the standard of living that we have become accustomed.

The world is a very different place than it was just a short twenty years ago. The level of consciousness has been raised in many aspects of our lives. A commentary stated, "The standard of living had a numerical value placed on it," with those in the

United States of America obtaining the highest level. At what cost is afforded in order to maintain this standard of living. The effort in developing the rest of the planet to obtain the same standard of living has been great, but at what cost to whomever. Ideological goals will never point to a mutual nucleus, since the moral fiber in each of us is driven by the varied circumstances that cross each of our paths. Combine goals of nations and the equation becomes much more intricate. It is known that when mixing two different temperature materials together, the cooler product always lowers the temperature of the hotter product. The endeavor to maintain the standard of living is certain to escalate in matters of money, time and sacrifice.

At times regulations are considered a nuisance rather than a benefit, but if a problem was not solved by the fathers before us, we would surely be sustaining a level of living, one that would be undesirable today. Just think if you had to have a tooth extracted by the procedures during the 1800's. Let's not go there!

The regulations and the programs which relate to continuing a supply of quality groundwater (water in general) have developed; become overwhelming; as well as with regulations in wastewater, health and safety and even office etiquette. Boy, Are we developing! Do regulations try an attempt at sustaining a utopian life style? Will we ever live like the folks portrayed in futuristic shows of the 23rd century? As we solve one set of concerns, we are oblivious of another set of problems. Crystal Ball, where are you? Only time will tell!

Groundwater, even though not thought of much in our daily lives, still continues to flow in both numbers of persons served as well as increased usage. The capability to supply an *adequate* flow of good *clean* water to the people we are responsible has heightened when it comes to money, time and effort. Try to picture gathering the entire surface water in our nation into one basin and then multiplying that by 30 times; you'll see in your mind the volume of groundwater available. If we have so much water, what sense does it make to write regulations in the hope of preserving our supplies?

Is it possible to prove with a numerical value that the regulations have preserved our water? Someone

should write a “what if” scenario on how life would be if we didn’t have the regulations pertaining to water. Can a timeline be written of the past 100 years as if there were no regulations and a conclusion is made on the status of water?

One of the surest ways to sustain quality water to your customers is following the guidelines; otherwise known as regulations. Guidelines are written to assist those who provide water so the wheel isn’t reinvented each day. One regulation that will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2004 is that of the Drinking Water Protection Program, (DWPP). A synonym to the DWPP is the Wellhead Protection Program, (WHPP), which I am sure you have heard. Mandatory program, absolutely not! But, it is a program that when completed, will outline the points of vulnerability within the water system, list those points in which to upgrade and maintain a level of confidence in the minds of the customers.

For the past six years the state of Oregon has been working diligently on completing information tasks on public water systems that when obtained, will assist in the WHPP.

The WHPP identifies:

- ◆ The soil area surrounding the well at the surface directly above the portion of the aquifer that supplies the groundwater to the well.
- ◆ Identifies points within the area surrounding the well that MAY allow a contaminant to enter the aquifer faster than normal.
- ◆ Creates an outline to show how to better control or reduce possible contamination.
- ◆ Structures a list of resources to ensure a secondary source of water if the primary supply is deemed non-drinkable.

Is your soil like an up-side-down bowl that will divert water away from the aquifer or is it an umbrella with holes in it? Approximately 25% of all rainfall will filter down into our groundwater. The contaminants that rainfall washes into the aquifer are the concern of us all!

The WHPP can be a valuable tool to use for budgeting, capacity development and ease of mind that a public water system is complete in all aspects of guaranteed service to its customers. The greatest two benefits for establishing a certified WHPP are the reduced monitoring requirements of VOCs and SOCs from three year interval to a six year interval. If the public water system is at capacity or is in need of funding for expansion / improvements, agencies look in favor of a public water system that has a WHPP in place. Of course the end goal is to protect the water thus protecting customers

The WHPP (even though non-mandatory) is one of many regulations that has flowed down the pipe, “SORRY”, over the past twenty years that can create chaos in our minds as we do our job each day. Having to think of this or that or the exception to the rule, or that rule doesn’t apply to me, may actually spawn a sense of frustration. Everyone from time to time goes through this phase. Guidelines are part of everyday life to promote better quality of life. Even though some rules, laws, orders or directives may seem ridiculous, they are written for a purpose. The purpose may serve for a time or until technology proves differently. Can you imagine what people would have thought if there was a speed limit posted on the Oregon Trail of 55 miles per hour? That would have been one law way ahead of it’s time. The law today isn’t even considered bizarre, but just the norm.

As the water systems continue to develop, and regulations continue to guide our life styles, we have a privilege to serve a commodity that is not often thought of. It takes a special characteristic of a person to persist in the field of water and wastewater. Many times the position of water master wasn’t considered on our lists of people we want to be when we grow up. Consider this, “How much more important would water be compared to medicine if tomorrow we woke up and the taps didn’t flow?” If we at Oregon Association of Water Utilities can assist your public water system in any aspect of the business, or if we reduce your heart rate and put a smile on your face, then don’t hesitate to call. The best of everything that life has to offer! Mr. OpTIMist.