

## **Then Came “EPA’s 1974 SDWA”**

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In the television season of 1969-70, just three years prior to the new SDWA brought into existence by Congress, NBC produced a new series for television called “Then Came Bronson.” There were a total of 26 episodes starring Michael Parks. Michael Parks is a native to California, raised in the Sierra Nevada foothills in the small town of Ione.

The series portrayed Michael Parks as Jim Bronson. Jim Bronson was a recent, ex-newspaper man. There was a two hour pilot show that would set the stage for the series. In that pilot, Jim’s best friend Nick, Martin Sheen, jumped from a bridge to his death. But before his death he had Jim promise to buy back, from his wife, the motorcycle he had customized and sold to Nick, in the event something would happen to him.

Bronson then began thinking about the meaning of his own life. He decided to quit the rat race, his newspaper job, simplify, see the country on his motorcycle, visit some old friends and discover what life would put in his path. Bronson would work for the necessities of life. He owned his motorcycle, his bedroll, and the clothes on his back, which were usually corduroy pants, black tee shirt, a leather motorcycle jacket and a tight fitting sailor type stocking cap.

Bronson would frequently ride into a town each week, meet a young woman, do some kind of good deed, and promptly leave before any deep relationship could begin. You would then watch him ride off into the sunset only to return the next week in a new town. No wonder the series only lasted one season.

There is an old saying, “if it ain’t broken, don’t fix it” That, often times, is true. But sometimes things do need to be fixed such as bridges and the need for greater protection for our Nations public water systems.

On December 16, 1974 congress signed into law, the new 1974 Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). Unlike the 1969-70 series, “Then Came Bronson,” SDWA has continued for more than 32 years. It has

come to every public water system (PWS) in every state in America, unlike Bronson that at most visited 26 towns.

“Then Came SDWA” and it has come to stay. This new law, in 1974, was to focus on all waters actually or potentially designed for drinking use. Whether from above ground or underground sources. The SDWA requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to regulate all public water systems defined as systems that provide piped water for human consumption for at least sixty days a year to at least fifteen service connections or twenty-five people.

The EPA regulates PWS through the Primary Drinking Water Regulations, by which it first identifies contaminants that may pose a risk to human health and that occur in drinking water at potentially unsafe levels. The EPA then sets a Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) for each contaminant. That level is set below any predicted health risk. Next EPA creates a legally enforceable Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL). That level, the MCL, is the greatest amount of contaminant that will be allowed in the water supply. The MCL must be set as close as is feasible to the MCLG after taking into account the best technology, treatment techniques and costs. If there is neither an economically or technologically feasible MCL, nor an accurate way to measure the contaminant in the water, the EPA, since the 1996 amendments, may instead require a Treatment Technique for removing the contaminant.

Individual States, after proving to EPA, that they will adopt and enforce standards at least as stringent as the national standards, will generally obtain primary authority to implement the SDWA. However, while the states may oversee the program, the PWS themselves physically ensure the safety for the tap water through treatment, testing, and reporting. In addition to the tap protections the EPA also require water suppliers to protect initial water sources from contamination. In particular, the SDWA provides for an Underground Injection Control (UIC) program to prevent contamination of underground water sources by underground injection of contaminated fluids.

Due to much criticism that the original act was an inflexible, unfunded mandate with an unattainable

regulatory schedule, the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress extensively amended the act in 1996. The main points of the 1996 amendments are: 1. Consumer Confidence Reports: All community water systems must prepare and distribute annual reports about the water they provide. 2. Cost-Benefit Analysis: US EPA must conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis for every new standard to determine whether the benefits of a drinking water standard justify the costs. 3. Drinking Water State Revolving Fund: States can use this fund to help water systems make infrastructure or management improvements or to help systems assess and protect their source water. 4. Microbial Contaminants and Disinfection Byproducts: The EPA was required to strengthen protection for microbial contaminants, including Cryptosporidium, while strengthening control over the byproducts of chemical disinfection. First, the Stage 1 Disinfectants and Disinfection Byproducts Rule and the Interim Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule. Then, the Stage 2 Disinfectants and Disinfection Byproducts rule and the Initial Distribution System Evaluation Rule (IDSE). 5. Operator Certification: Water system operators must be certified to ensure that systems are operated safely. The EPA in February 1999 issued guidelines specifying minimum standards for the certification and recertification of the operators of community and non-transient, non-community water systems. 6. Public Information and Consultation: SDWA emphasizes that consumers have a right to know what is in their drinking water, where it comes from, how it is treated and how to help protect it. 7. Small Water Systems: Small water systems are given special consideration and resources under SDWA, to make sure they have the managerial, financial, and technical ability to comply with drinking water standards.

The most important element of the amendments was the critically necessary funding mechanism added to the SDWA's stringent water quality requirements. This fund provided federal monetary aid to public water systems to repair and upgrade their facilities, focusing particularly on assisting small and disadvantaged communities that might otherwise find these repairs too expensive. The fund also gave priority to programs using pollution prevention to safeguard their drinking water supply.

"Then Came Bronson," was a brand new series intended to provide the American Public with new

and fresh entertainment. "Then Came SDWA," was a brand new rule intended to provide the American Public with protection for their tap water and the source of that supply. The series Then Came Bronson, I never hear mentioned these days. In contrast, I often hear people express a lack of understanding about some aspect of one of the SDWA rules as it pertains to a water system and how the rule is confusing and hard to understand and implement.

I agree, most of the new and old SDWA rules are complex and can be quite confusing. However, the OAWU field staff has an understanding of these rules. The OAWU field personnel are able to offer aid, provide assistance and guidance as you work through the many aspects of these rules. OAWU also provides training opportunities both specifically and in general during the year to help you and your water system implement these new rules and keep your system in compliance.

You may well be thinking what does an old television series have in common with SDWA? Good question. Glad you may have had that thought on your mind. The point is we often subject ourselves to some very low quality entertainment we find on the television, such as, "Then Came Bronson." We give it no thought. Go to bed, only to wake up in the morning finding it hard to remember what it was we watched on T.V. the night before.

I wanted to show by contrast as both the T.V. series and SDWA came to the American people at about the same time, that even though the series may have had some entertaining value, it did not last nor did it change or protect our lives. By contrast the US EPA, through the implementation of the SDWA, has made much needed improvements to our Nation's water supplies. Even though a newly implemented rule may be difficult to understand and possibly frustrating, the benefit from these rules to the PWS you serve, will be worthwhile as you provide a greater level of protection for your water system.