Representative Policy Board Consumer Affairs Committee South Central Connecticut Regional Water District

Minutes of the May 18, 2020 Meeting Transcription

The regular meeting of the Consumer Affairs Committee ("CAC") of the Representative Policy Board of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District ("RPB") took place on Monday, May 18, 2020 via remote access. Committee members present were: N. Campbell, M. Levine, S. Mongillo, F. Pepe and T. Rescigno.

Also present were: M. Ricozzi (RPB), J. Cermola (Authority member), J. Donofrio (Office of Consumer Affairs – "OCA"), T. Barger, L. Discepolo, B. Nesteriak and P. Singh (RWA), and J. Slubowski (RPB Staff)

Stephen:

Yeah, are we... 5:29. I was just waiting another few seconds, but I guess that's going to be all right. It is now 5:30, so I will call the May Consumer Affairs Committee meeting to order. First item on the agenda is the safety moment. Good suggestions here on disinfecting clothes. I hope everybody will look at it. I saw this in another meeting. They've been doing really well with all these safety moment ideas. Good idea to read it over. First item on the agenda besides that is the approval of the minutes from our April 20th meeting. Somebody move those.

20th meeting. Somebody move those.
Frank:
Approved.
Tony:
Second.
Stephen:
Okay. Those minutes are relatively straightforward. It was our joint meeting to review the budgets. Ar there any comments, suggestions, omissions, corrections? All those in favor?
Group:
Aye.
Stephen:
Minutes pass. Item three is a special topic for this meeting. Tom Barger is here. Thanks, Tom, for being here.
Tom:
You're welcome, Steve. Thanks for having me.
Stephen:
You're going to update us on some aspects of the water quality report.

Tom:

Yeah. Thank you very much, and good afternoon, everyone. I just wanted to take this opportunity to speak to the 2019 Water Quality Report, with specific interest in the particular sample that was collected in May of 2019 where there was a manganese exceedance. It was kind of a squirrely situation, so I just wanted to provide some background on why it's here. Jennifer, you can continue to the next.

Stephen:

Tom, by the way, in these reports, we rarely if ever see any exceedance, right?

Tom:

That's very true. Water Quality Reports, Steve, just as a reminder, is an obligation that we have under the federal law to report detection of various regulated and non-regulated compounds. Typically it's reporting things that we see, but to have an exceedance that's far and away, head and shoulders above what we would ever expect to see is... This is, I think, a first, to be quite frank.

Stephen:

Ok.

Tom:

Just in the way of background for folks that may not be as familiar with the Water Quality Report, in federal parlance this is referred to as the consumer confidence report. As I said previously, a required EPA document all utility customers to receive to provide information on the presence of various [inaudible 00:04:38], both regulated and unregulated.

Tom:

UCMR is the Unregulated Contaminate Monitoring Rule. This is something that the EPA undertakes every five years or so. It's 25 or 30 different potential contaminates that EPA wants to gather information on. It helps them make some decisions as to whether they want to regulate them in the future. This happens to be the fourth iteration of this effort, so it is referred to as UCMR 4. The previous UCMR 3 was in the neighborhood of 2014, so we did all of our work on UCMR 4 in 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.

Tom:

We also took this opportunity to proactively publish the PFAS data that we had accumulated via sample collection in 2019. We'll be repeating that process in 2020, but it is presented here. Hit it, Jennifer.

Tom:

Basically, getting right down to the nitty gritty here, there was a manganese sample that was collected in May 2019 from our North Cheshire Wellfield. It's a manganese requirement for collection. It was part of UCMR 4. It was one of those 25 to 30 compounds that we need to take a look at. Now, manganese is nothing new. Manganese has been regulated by the federal government as a secondary standard for as far back as I can remember, and in Connecticut, there is an action level for manganese. It's not an unknown to us. Like many of the things in the UCMR process, these are things that aren't regulated. They're kind of... Really it's background information, and you may have read about it. It's not top of mind type of things. Manganese is an exception.

Tom:

The fact that we found that we had an exceedance was quite surprising, but let me explain what had happened. Typically, your sample collectors go out, and they collect these samples specific to this rule. The rule defines it under the structure around the sample collection schedule. Some of these are done monthly. Some are done quarterly. Some are done certain times of the year, as an example, cyanobacteria. That's only a factor in growing season, if you will, because those are planktonic [inaudible 00:07:06].

Tom:

But basically in this particular situation, a sample collector had gone out to North Cheshire. Any of our sample collection taps are taken off the distributions mains in the sense that it's the water leaving the treatment plant property. There's a tap there. A line goes off of that. It runs to various analyzers, chlorine, fluoride, PH, and then it essentially terminates at a city tap.

Tom:

One of kind of the golden rules when you're sample collecting is don't touch the tap, because by turning the tap up and down, it turns the water flow. It influences the water that's passing through the analyzers and messes with their accuracy. So one of the golden rules is you don't touch the tap.

Tom:

When we're out collecting samples on a daily basis, and we're taking two small containers of water, 100 mls in one case, 250 mls in the other. It's 20 seconds worth of water that we're collecting. Once a quarter, we'll go out and we'll get eight containers of 250 mls. It may take us two minutes to sample those. Not a big deal.

Tom:

When you come into something like UCMR here, you're collecting gallons of water. It literally takes you 15 or 20 minutes [inaudible 00:08:27] the rate of flow on these sample taps [inaudible 00:08:29]. Again, that's necessarily because of the analyzers and the sensitivity of the analyzers.

Tom:

So I think what had happened is this literally was the last stop on this sample collector's route that day. He's been collecting these samples, 15, 20 minutes at each stop. He's got 10, 12 stops. I think he got impatient when he got up to North Cheshire and he turned the tap up to try to save himself some time. So what happens now, when you have a sample tap that's run particularly, it's running at a relatively low rate of flow at a quarter inch line. It's small. It's tiny.

Tom:

When you turn that tap up, you create a hydraulic change in that rate of flow. That essentially [inaudible 00:09:16] that line. It's equivalent of walking down the street and opening up a fire hydrant full of water, and it just really [inaudible 00:09:23] out. So you can kind of appreciate what that looks like. This is the same type of situation in a miniature type of setting. What had happened was when you turn the tap up, you swell the line and that's where the manganese exceedance came, as a result of a hydraulic change on the sample line. I'll refer to that as mistake number one.

Tom:

We look at the last bullet here. The concentration really wasn't reflective, honestly, of what was going out to the consumers. This hydraulic upset, because [inaudible 00:10:02] the line, really was limited to the sample. If you took a sample off of the big distribution main that's headed to the street, [inaudible 00:10:13] on a quarter inch line is not going to have any influence on that whatsoever. The water that the consumers were getting was perfectly fine, unadulterated, very normal, so the issue here was really isolated to this small diameter sample line specific to this location. The next slide, Jennifer.

Tom:

In learning this and understanding what had happened, we did a couple of things to try to resolve this so that it doesn't happen again. The first thing is treatment staff have initiated sample line flushing protocols to remove these accumulated sediments at all of our treatment sampling locations. All seven of our well fields and from our surface plants, so at these 11 locations, the treatment guys take it upon themselves and circumstances to run these lines, purge them out of anything that may have accumulated, so that it doesn't become problematic in the future.

Tom:

Now, this is something that will certainly help us. There are periods of time where the analyzers have to be removed from service for replacement, maintenance. The sample pumps have to be removed from time to time for maintenance, replacement, that type of thing. We can't avoid those issues, but at least you can plan for them. You can work around them. I think this flushing protocol that we've instituted will take away some of those unforeseen type of situations.

Tom:

The second thing that we've done is water quality staff has attended, and all three of my sample collectors have attended, it's a proper sample collection technique refresher offered by the New England Waterworks Association. It's a half day course typically taught at the NBC at their Hartford facilities. We've attended that. All three guys independently told me it was a good idea. It's always nice. Sometimes you become a little complacent, so it was good to kind of get a refresher on these sample collection techniques. It's appreciated by those guys, so that I was happy to see.

Tom:

Basically, we had a reporting requirement [inaudible 00:12:34]. Again, you only have to report those analytes we actually have had a detection. Anything where you get a BDL, a low detection limit or a non detection on the report, we have to report it wasn't there, so it makes sense. We're obligated to report all data from [inaudible 00:12:52] detections. Specific to manganese concentration, we also are obligated to report that, even though that was something that never went to the consumer, and I would like to underscore that point.

Tom:

We did attempt to seek a variance for having to report the manganese, because it didn't represent what the consumer was experiencing. I think the issue here is when we collect UCMR 4 data, it's done over a period of a year. Again, different scheduling frequencies. You have to get them out of a laboratory, whether it's our laboratory or a laboratory that we're subcontracting with.

Tom:

That laboratory has to take its results and pass them back to the originating utility, which of course would be us, and we're given a period to review that data. If we're reviewing the data and the data looks a little unusual to us, questionable, we have the opportunity to pull that out and review the circumstances. In those cases, you can't reevaluate data if you can't, to the satisfaction of the EPA, explain an extenuating circumstance.

Tom:

So mistake number two in this particular case, was that we missed that 60 day deadline. I don't have necessarily an excuse for that. It's not something that I was reviewing. I can tell you it is something I am reviewing now. We had not ever had the experience with that until the first of this year. I can tell you the data comes in probably three to four days a week, anywhere between two, three, four times a day. It's something that I do address before I leave each day, so I don't let it compact over a period of days or weeks.

Tom:

If I did that, I can see where you would miss a review. It's a lot of data to look at. Learning from this mistake made by others, I put into practice now the way I look at this data on [inaudible 00:15:06] problems. Everything is good.

Tom:

Even though we were outside of that 60 day period, we did go back to the Connecticut Department of Public Health. We attempted to keep it a variance under the circumstances. DPH in short said this UCMR process, it's a federal process. [inaudible 00:15:25] does not cover [inaudible 00:15:27] directly to EPA, but DPH would support us, given the fact that they understoodd it's [inaudible 00:15:36].

Tom:

So we petitioned EPA, and unfortunately they declined to recognize the variance, because they said we had our 60 day window. We missed it. Too bad for us. In fact, we did not get the variance we were seeking, and therefore it was published in the 2019 Water Quality Report. They did give us the opportunity to add language. If you take a look, we did add language related to the issue, so they did give us a little bit of that there, because we thought it was important that people understand that this did not represent what [inaudible 00:16:16].

Tom:

Were there any particular... I think the next slide is for questions, so any questions from the committee specific to this particular event, or anything else that you may have on your mind?

Stephen:

Tom, I have a few, but I'll let anybody else go first if they have a question.

Naomi:

Yes, Tom?

Tom:

Yes, Naomi?

Naomi:

This is Naomi. I have a question. Say this manganese did get to a residence. How would they know? Is it by taste, smell? What would draw their attention to this?

Tom:

Yeah. Manganese has always been kind of on the books, Naomi, as a secondary standard, because of its potential to stain laundry. It does show up. If you were to see it in water and it settled to the bottom, it looks like black pepper. It's very fine, almost like a black talcum if you let it settle out of the water, but it's a significant stain [inaudible 00:17:18].

Naomi:

Okay. Thank you.

Tom:

You're welcome.

Stephen:

Anyone else? Is someone talking? I can't hear. I hear some talking, but it's way in the background. Tom, in the report, there's a column, average level and range detected. Now, is there a different requirement for each of these different compounds in terms of how often you have to test?

Tom:

There is. Are you speaking specifically about the manganese, Steve?

Stephen:

Yeah, but the question would apply to any of them. I'm assuming there's a different number of samples you might have to collect by virtue of what they are and how they might react. How many did we get, for instance, to come up with this range for manganese?

Tom:

Manganese is actually just required on an annual basis from well water supply. If we have 23 different well water supplies, we would have to get 23 samples. In reality, we do a lot more than that. It's tough for me to gauge that specifically, but manganese is something that in some places, we're looking at, at least quarterly. In some cases where we do know manganese has a history, has a little bit of a background, we're looking at it [inaudible 00:18:52]. It's something we're aware of, something that does hold our attention because we know of its potential.

Stephen:

Okay. In the same vein, if you collected the sample and it was out of range, is there any requirement to test within a certain time period now, or do you have discretion as to when to retest?

Tom:

Within the UCMR process, you have that 60 day window to identify something that doesn't look right to you, and then you do have an opportunity to go out and re-sample.

Stephen:

Okay. That was the window you were talking about. I missed it.

Tom:

Now what we'll do too, Steve, the way [inaudible 00:19:42], we collect the sample on any given day. We have the ability and we exercise the ability within the limit system to set what's referred to as auto spec. So if something should be there and it's not, or something that shouldn't and it is, we can put together, and we have put together some very tight ranges of acceptability. If the number that we bring in [inaudible 00:20:06] reports just internally is out of spec, and it's actually part of a daily generated report for out of spec, so we then can research the cause and correct it right away.

Stephen:

I would think if you tested the very next day, you would have a lot of credibility if that number came way down, as opposed to waiting 60 days to get that number.

Tom:

No, absolutely, and I'm sure that was made available to us, and that review was missed.

Stephen:

Okay. Okay, good. Good report in general again. We did well with all of these things. I wanted to ask you also, I've been on the board a while, and years ago, it seemed like there were more scientific people working at the Regional Water Authority, and a lot of in-house kind of testing that was going on, this list for disinfection byproducts, and I remember way back when they were doing their own studies on these things. Is any of that being done now at all? Anything?

Tom:

We still do our own disinfection byproduct work at Sargent Drive. We do all of our analytical work for sure. You'll see us on list four for UCMR 4, because I'm thinking that we did those as well in-house, but to be able to do some of this more advanced work under the UCMR 4 process, your laboratory has to be certified to do the work.

Tom:

So if this is kind of advanced stuff, and this is where we have gotten a lot of work, because we're one of the laboratories that can get the certification, and doing that for a number of other utilities. We're still doing a lot of that. That's part of the laboratory's revenue type thing.

Stephen:

Are we doing anything that we're not required to do, just as a way of just understanding these processes better?

Tom:

Right. There's a certain number of things, Steve, that we're doing that we don't have to do. What we're doing more of is the things that we are obligated to do. We've upped the frequency. For instance, if something has an annual requirement, we're typically doing it quarterly. If something has a quarterly

requirement, we may be doing it monthly, but we do more than we need to, to keep an eye on things that we feel warrant a closer view.

Stephen:

Okay. The basic difference between regulated and unregulated is what? Just that they don't have a range for it or a number?

Tom:

Basically regulated, it's a form of regulation. It's in law. It's required as part of the Safe Drinking Water Act. We have to look for. Unregulated currently typically are those associated with the UCMR process that the EPA is using as a vehicle to collect information. They want get an idea of some of these contaminates. Are they a nationwide contaminate?

Tom:

PFAS is a good example. That was something that still isn't regulated, but they have put out some call for those compounds to try to get a better appreciation for where are they and what are the background environmental concentrations. Now, anecdotal information suggests that the next UCMR process, number five, somewhere around 2023, is going to be nothing but PFAS compounds.

Stephen:

I would imagine there are things added to this all the time, right?

Tom:

Yeah, this is a very long process, this UCMR. That's why it takes five years to get it out, because there's [inaudible 00:24:02] to academia, et cetera. They start with several hundred compounds on a list. Then they narrow it from 25 to 30, so it is a process between EPA and its academic partners. They define by vote, essentially, what's going to make the final tally. It takes a while.

Stephen:

Okay. Very good. Thank you, Tom. Any other questions for Tom?

Mark:

No. I thought you did a great job.

Tom:

Thank you. Thank you.

Stephen:

Tom, you're free to go.

Tom:

All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Stephen:

May 18, 2020
See you later.
Tom:
Take care.
Stephen:
Bye bye.
Tom:
Bye bye.
Stephen:
Item four on the agenda, Consumer Affairs Committee report, the OCA.

Jeff:

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee

A couple of things that I've been working on. Obviously you have received a copy of my budget letter, which was my annual comments and input. This is obviously a very challenging and very unusual year for all of us, and unfortunately the need to adapt and really kind of think outside the box is required for most businesses, and as I indicated in my reflections and my budget letter, I thought that the Authority in very short order did an excellent job of putting together in a very conscientious and transparent manner, capital and O and M budgets that reflect the likely challenges that are going to continue well into next calendar year, and certainly throughout the next fiscal year that begins June 1st.

Jeff:

Also, you received last week my memorandum to the RPB concerning the Authority's application for the North Sleeping Giant Wellfield project, which we'll have a hearing this coming Thursday on.

Jeff:

In addition to those items, we do have one new consumer complaint. It's a little bit of an unusual situation. We have a customer who lives in Maine now who owns property in New Haven and had his meter changed as a result of... It was a stuck meter, and it was not registering any consumption. The meter was changed back in 2017 to a Neptune meter. From late September until mid November of last year, it was pretty much 24/7 water usage registering at this apartment unit in New Haven, despite the fact that it's vacant.

Jeff:

That generated a bill of over \$800, and the Authority calculated a waste adjustment of roughly \$414, which the consumer doesn't want to accept. The customer contacted our office after it was referred to us a couple of weeks ago in early May, and he did tell us, the customer did tell us that he had a plumber out to fix a leaking toilet, but at this point, we're still having discussions with the customer and with the Authority to try to bring this to a resolution.

Stephen:

Jeff, we now have the ability to look at the pattern, so if we could see that leak, if the usage was consistent until the leak was fixed, it would kind of explain things. That's a new meter too?



ended, so something must have been fixed during that time, is what we at the company think.

Jeff:

We'd like to get from the customer copies of any bills for there so that we can try to reconcile. Yeah, I mean, I think it's premature for us to form a final opinion on it, but what it looks like so far is that he did have somebody come out and fix his toilet, and he said he didn't think there was a leak. He had a lot of communications with the Authority customer service. I think this is kind of a classic situation where he knows there was a leak. He just doesn't like the large balance after the adjustment.

Ste	nh	Δn	
Jie	μij	CII	•

Yeah.

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee May 18, 2020 Frank: Jeff, how much did you... It was \$800 and how much dollars? What was the total of that, \$800 and something? Linda: It was \$894.51. Jeff: Almost 900 bucks, yeah. Frank: And then you offered him to pay \$414 with almost 50% off the bill, and he's still not happy with that, Jeff? Jeff: Yeah. The way that the waste adjustment was calculated... Well, it was calculated two different ways, but the higher calculation was \$414 and change. I know all the interest was likewise abated. Linda: Typically what we do is split the consumption in half. We pick up half the tab. They'll pick up half the tab. The service charge is normal, so that's a cost that the customer would assume. That's why it's not the bill divided by two exactly. Frank: Where did he leave that with you when you said that? Did he want to make a payment plan, or did he make any attempt, or still he thought it was too much? Linda: He thought it was too much. He didn't want any payment plan. We had mentioned that our OCA is where he can escalate it to, because he went through all the management within this organization. Naomi: Linda, where is he currently located? Jeff: He's at 29 Oak Ridge Drive. Naomi:

I'm sorry. What was it?

Oak Ridge Drive.

Jeff:

Naomi:

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee May 18, 2020
Okay.
Linda:
There must be apartments there. He's a unit within there.
Naomi:
Okay.
Stephen:
Linda, this is Steve. Just out of curiosity, what are you seeing with regard to usage from the old meters to the new meters? Is there changes in any patterns, or are they registering the same things that the old meters did or different?
Linda:
For the most part, very few of them don't sometimes they're frozen or whatever and they don't register. We don't test every single meter, but of them we do, usually it's on task. If anything, they'll run slower, not faster.
Stephen:
Okay.
Mario:
Linda, this is Mario.
Frank:
Where do we stand with this, Jeff?
Jeff:
Usually what we try to do when we get the feeling that the bill is just a little bit too high for the customer is exhaust our discussions with him about what really happened, because we can see when he had the service done, and we can say all right, well, it looks like on November 12th you had a plumber out, and that's when the high bill ended. That obviously means that the high consumption was the result of whatever you had the plumber fix.
Jeff:
Then we can walk him through the logical resolution, which would be to say, "Why don't you accept the waste adjustment of roughly half the consumption, and that will leave you will a bill of about \$470. Why don't we see if we can get you an interest-free payment plan, so that you can pay that in monthly

Then we can walk him through the logical resolution, which would be to say, "Why don't you accept the waste adjustment of roughly half the consumption, and that will leave you will a bill of about \$470. Why don't we see if we can get you an interest-free payment plan, so that you can pay that in monthly installments." That's where we'd like to end up, is have the customer pay the bill net of the waste adjustment, but do so in a monthly payment plan. My understanding is that he's a retired police officer living up in Maine, so if we can come up with a reasonable payment plan that works for both sides that would be a fair outcome.

Frank:

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee May 18, 2020 Yes, okay. [crosstalk 00:35:18] Mark: Sounds very good to me. Frank: Sounds good to me. Stephen: Tony, did you have a comment, question? Tony: Nope. Stephen: How about Mario? Were you trying to say something? Mario: I was just curious. In 2016 with the zero consumption, do you know how long that was going on for before we were able to get in and change the meter? Linda: No, I don't have that history. Mario: Okay. No problem. Linda: Do you want me to research it? Mario: No, it's okay. Stephen: That's a good point. For some point of time, the customer isn't getting billed. That's a good point to make during the discussion. Jeff: Yeah, that was discussed in the first conversation that Lou had with him, because I picked up on it in Linda's initial email. You have to take that into consideration. It's not unusual that customers don't see

both sides of it.

Stephen:

13

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee May 18, 2020
Oh, really?
Linda: You're shocked.
Jeff: It's okay to have zero consumption, but then when there's a leak, they want 100% adjustment. That's it for me.
Stephen: That's it for you. Thank you, Jeff. Next item on the agenda is the approval of the OCA invoice for April in the amount of \$4,496.06.
Tony: I move we approve.
Frank: I have a question, Jeff. I got your letter. The balance was \$9,750. Was that letter sent out and then you were paid?
Jeff: Yeah. What happened was, the last meeting there wasn't a quorum. The bill didn't get approved. I think it was the February meeting there wasn't a quorum. Then it got approved in March and paid in April, or March meeting, there wasn't a quorum, so it got approved in April and paid in May. Yeah, the bottom line is whichever invoice there wasn't a quorum to approve was paid between the time the bill was sent out now.
Frank: Okay, okay. Yeah. I have one here for \$9,750.
Jeff: Yeah. That balance was paid.
Stephen: I still need a second on this motion.
Naomi: I second it.
Stephen: Thank you.
Mark:

A little high, don't you think? [crosstalk 00:38:06]

RPB Consumer Affairs Committee May 18, 2020
Stephen: I didn't ask for comments, just question.
Mark: On page two, you have 1.51 hours. I thought that he was not in the office that day.
Jeff: I can tell you it doesn't even matter what day you're looking at. I was in the office.
Stephen: Having resolved that? All those in favor.
Group: Aye.
Stephen: So the OCA invoice is approved. Item six now on the agenda is volunteers to attend the Authority meetings moving forward. Jennifer, I assume June is going to be a virtual or a Zoom meeting.
Jennifer: Yes, that's correct.
Stephen: Okay. We'll have to see beyond that. Any of those four dates, are they good for anybody in terms of being able to attend?
Okay. We'll have to see beyond that. Any of those four dates, are they good for anybody in terms of
Okay. We'll have to see beyond that. Any of those four dates, are they good for anybody in terms of being able to attend? Tony:
Okay. We'll have to see beyond that. Any of those four dates, are they good for anybody in terms of being able to attend? Tony: What's the date of the June meeting? Stephen:
Okay. We'll have to see beyond that. Any of those four dates, are they good for anybody in terms of being able to attend? Tony: What's the date of the June meeting? Stephen: It's the 18th. [crosstalk 00:39:21] Tony:

Stephen:

Stephen:

Stay healthy, everybody. [crosstalk 00:40:59]

Yeah, Jennifer, do representatives generally stay on the entire day, or when they have subcommittee things, do they not participate? How does it usually work?

times, do they not participate. Now does it askany work.
Jennifer:
Usually if there's an executive session, we try to put it at the end of the meeting, so that the RPB member can stay for most of the meeting.
Stephen:
Okay, but they have an option to participate in whatever-
Jennifer:
Yeah, absolutely. Yup.
Stephen:
So if anybody else can do even partials through the summer and into September, actually, June, we can discuss it at our June meeting again, but if anybody would be willing to look at that again, let us know next time around. We'll go from there.
Stephen:
Our next meeting is June 15th. I don't know what the topic is yet, but I assume that will be a Zoom meeting as well. Unless anybody has anything else, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.
Mark:
I'll move.
Mark:
I'll move.
Frank:
Seconded.
Stephen:
All right. All those in favor.
Group:
Aye.