

SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY

ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

MARCH 28, 2024

MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

[ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING BEGINS AT 2:00 P.M.]

David:

We are now meeting as Environmental Health and Safety, Mario, it's all yours.

Mario:

So this month we've got three different topics, but first, motion to approve the minutes of November 16th?

David:

So moved.

Mario:

Is there a second?

Kevin:

Second.

Mario:

And a second. Any comments, questions, amendments? All those in favor of approval of the minutes say aye.

Committee members:

Aye.

Mario:

Opposed? Unanimous. Thank you. Excuse me, as I started there are three topics that we're looking at this month and in the interest of time, I've asked Sunny to give a brief highlight on each memo one at a time and allow everyone to ask questions along the way. So Sunny, if you want to start with the Raw Water Quality Study.

Sunny:

Sure. Thanks, Mario. Great. The first one would be the Raw Water Quality Program that we have been doing it for a long time, to kind of I would say maintain the quality of all the surface water reservoirs. The memo kind of delves into detail about the 2024 sampling schedule. What we have done is new sampling initiatives at select sources as well as the disinfected byproducts focused sampling specific to

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the Gaillard System, right? So it also will provide some highlights on the preventative ILT site treatments used at our reservoirs, as well as what we are going into the 21st century so to speak, on the latest technologies that we are trying to bring into regional, which could make data available 24/7, 365 for better decision making and robust decision making. With that said, I would say open it up I would say to questions and Will Henley is going to join us from the environmental planning. He was instrumental in authoring this memo and he is a senior aquatic resource scientist who pretty much you can see him on the board doing the sampling in that picture which Jennifer just had.

So with that, I will open up for questions and I would say I'm sure all of you would have had a chance to read the memo.

Mario:

Any questions on the Raw Water Quality Study? Yes.

David:

I'm not sure I read it right, but the question you posed in the first paragraph was the ROI may take a little bit longer, but I didn't see it quantified unless I missed that. So I think if you're looking at automating much more of the processes that we have to do to see where the best water to get at what level from where, if that makes sense. But if it's a 20-year payback, maybe it doesn't make as much sense. Maybe we need eyes on the properties when you're going and doing that as a way of keeping check on the properties. Just my thoughts that I have.

Sunny:

I can get back I would say on those responses. I think when we looked at initially guesstimating these numbers, we are guesstimating about say \$25,000 to \$30,000 per site.

David:

Okay.

Sunny:

So the ROI may not be long-drawn and also it's going to save... The automation will help, I would say reduce water loss as well as it'll save, I would say people to go out there and do I would say the manual process. So there is that portion of I would say the savings related to resources, staffing, as well as kind of the water quality side as well. So if you take an average, what we are guesstimating is about say \$25,000 to do improvements. So it's about two to three improvements, maybe about say 75 [inaudible 00:05:01].

David:

Automation is usually good. Just sometimes I know we've had security issues. That's why I wondered if maybe it's almost another set of eyes that's going there on a weekly or every other day basis or whatever it is that might help keep an eye on things.

Kevin:

How often would they go?

Sunny:

Yes, I'm going to kind of I would say bring in Will Henley to add to my answer, right? Will, I mean if you have more thoughts on what the question, David and I, my response is as well as Kevin's question on how often do you go or does our treatment folks go?

Will:

Sure. Can everyone hear me?

David:

Yes, thanks, Will.

Will:

Cool. So is this question about remote monitoring reservoirs or automation of some of our valves out in the system?

Sunny:

This is actually the automation reservoir is to with the dry water supply in different depths of the water using [inaudible 00:05:50].

Will:

Sure, Yes. So I mean this is right now the automation is specific to one system, so like Saltonstall. And what we're really looking to do is utilize this automation for, let's say for example, there's a huge storm over this weekend. It's very difficult to get a staff person in the middle of the night after Easter to come out and make a change that would be critical to raw water quality. So this is more about being able to make those manipulations when staff are not available and also being able to save water when really what we need to do is have an aggressive response during the peak of poor water quality incidents and then reduce back quickly so that way we don't lose any water. Right now we're kind of doing something in the middle where we're kind of trying to guess as to the weather, make changes in advance, then we could lose additional water or not discharge enough water. So we're either not mitigating the impact enough or we're over mitigating and we're losing excess water.

So that's part of the automation and these sites are still visited every Monday by field staff, so it's something that eyes are still on. Does that help answer the question?

David:

It does. I think I'd be comfortable doing that. The only thing that I would miss is that every Monday now there won't be another set of eyes on the property, which we know we have vandalism issues, but we have a full compliment of policemen now.

Kevin:

I don't think this eliminates that one day visit.

David:

Okay.

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Kevin:

This eliminates that oh, we have the storm in the middle of the night.

David:

Oh, okay.

Kevin:

We now need to make an adjustment. So you're able to, as an operator, if I could speak for that perspective. You're able to look at what's the raw water coming in? Oh, wow, it's really getting poor at this particular reservoir. Let me pull more out of this plant than that plant [inaudible 00:07:41].

David:

Or the height or the depth within the water.

Kevin:

And the depth, that's what I think. Take the top third-

David:

Right, okay.

Kevin:

... the bottom third, install it and then it helps-

David:

I get it.

Kevin:

... to install.

David:

Okay, thank you.

Will:

[inaudible 00:07:54].

Kevin:

It's actually a fairly small investment.

David:

Yes, it is [inaudible 00:07:58]-

Kevin:

... a good benefit to it.

Will:

Specifically with some of these intense rainstorms that we're seeing now, it's become more critical. In this system in particular like Saltonstall, we get a large deluge of poor water quality from the Branford Hill side of things, where Furnace Pond is and that water will backflow and directly impact the water treatment plant. And so being able to act on this immediately, it really is beneficial and it does save on staff time. Usually when conditions are really poor, we'll bring in a staff member on overtime, but then we won't bring in another staff member to rectify the situation until Monday. So we're kind of losing water that we might not need to lose or we're, like I said, not making the right adjustment just because we're kind of hedging our bets a little bit.

Mario:

Thank you. Other questions? Thank you very much [inaudible 00:09:03].

Will:

Thank you, guys.

Mario:

[inaudible 00:09:05]. Health and safety [inaudible 00:09:09].

Sunny:

Thanks, Mario. Okay. I think Joshua Tracy, who is our invasive species management technician authored the memo. It kind of I would say talks about the plan for mitigation going into 2024, as well as again using I would say another newer methodology to control invasives. Again, we were lucky enough to get a grant from USDA and as part of the grant we were actually getting this team leader. This was one of the things we were contemplating for a long time to whether to buy this or not because it was more experimental. And now with this grant, it gives us the luxury to buy this and experiment with it. With that said Josh, I would say have you give a quick intro and then maybe open it up for questions quick.

Josh:

Yes. Hi, guys. So Yes, basically as Sunny has said, I've been working on invasive species here since 2018. I've been trying to come up with novel ideas in order to eradicate invasives on our 27,000 acres. One of these pieces of technology I've been looking at is the steam weeder, which uses a high pressurized liquid steam to burn herbaceous material. One of the plants we have a huge issue with is Japanese stiltgrass and they grow along our woods' roads and within log landings when we do timber management. So we're hoping that this could be a tool we can use to slowly eradicate the plant and have less issue with causing sedimentation into our reservoirs. These plants can increase the amount of erosion that goes into the reservoir and lead to increased DBPs. So the faster we can work on getting rid of these plants, the better. So with that I can open up to questions.

Mario:

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On the basis so I had one, Josh. I presume there's a whole health and safety aspect to this because I just think about the heated steam being a dangerous thing to work with if you're not very careful. Is that part of the training program for anyone who's going to use the equipment?

Josh:

Yes, so the company we're purchasing this from is going to be bringing the unit to us from Maine and there's going to be a half day or a full day training session on how to properly utilize it. It's incredibly safe in that the steam is produced in a diesel generator, but it's not produced within the container where the water is held. So there is a 300 gallon tank of cold water that is put into the diesel generator and pressurized at the tip so there is no high pressure steam anywhere except for the tip of the wand. It's basically like a pressure washer where you're running hose water in from your house and it's pressurized when you go to blow the algae off the side of your house. It's got an insulated hose and unless someone is right at the tip of the steam wand, it's perfectly safe.

Mario:

Yes. There's a picture. Yes, right inside there [inaudible 00:12:29].

David:

Very good.

Mario:

Other questions? Thank you very much, Josh.

Catherine:

Yes. Mario, I have a question.

Mario:

Oh, I'm sorry Catherine. I apologize.

Catherine:

That's okay. I'm being polite in raising my hand, which I don't do when I'm in the room, so you guys should be happy with that anyway. As one who goes to a lot of Land Use meetings, I noticed in John Triana's reports that every month or at least every quarter, it seems like we're increasing the mapping of invasive species, but very small or increment treatment of invasive species. I assume that this apparatus will help to speed up the treatment.

Josh:

Yes, I mean-

Catherine:

Is that correct?

Josh:

Yes, so we have something in the order of 30 or 35 different species of invasive species throughout our system. Some are far more common than others and each one has its own dedicated types of treatments and negative effects on the property. Some of them I consider low hanging fruit in that it can invest a very small amount of time and eradicate a very large area of them and some of them just take more time, more effort. So certain ones I have to utilize contractors with heavy machinery to go in and that due to the amount of money it costs will limit the amount of area they can cover. Whereas other times a year I can walk as one person in the woods and cut vines off of trees and cover a large portion of the property. So with the experimentation of this type of technology, we're trying to increase the amount of acreage that we can treat and try to increase the amount of tools we have to be able to attack these plants.

As Sunny had mentioned, we do have this grant that's allowing us to hire two interns or technicians for the next three years. They're going to be helping us with invasive species control. To date, I've been the only one that's really been doing it aside from the contractors, so we're going to have a lot more personnel on the ground doing this sort of work.

Mario:

Anything else?

Catherine:

And this is expensive equipment or reasonably priced equipment? I was looking for numbers.

Josh:

Yes, I did not include numbers, but this unit costs \$40,000 for the trailer, the steam weeder. It's being custom-built in Maine. It's a company out of Australia that produces this unit. So if it does not work, it'll be very valuable information to us and we didn't have to spend any money on it. But if it does work, it's going to be really, really, really important technology for other water utilities to know works and it'll be very effective on the rest of our properties.

Catherine:

And the lifecycle of the equipment is how long? You expect it to last for five years, 10 years?

Josh:

That's a good question. It's predominantly used in Australia for maintaining parks and doing weed control in schools where herbicides are off limits. I don't know how long the company has been around for and there are no numbers. There's no one online saying, "My unit crashed after five years or 10 years or something like that." The company may only have been around for the last 10 years or so. This is fairly new technology so unfortunately I don't have an answer for that.

Catherine:

Okay, thank you.

Josh:

You're welcome.

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Sunny:

Catherine, if I might add to the question, I think this was entirely paid through the grant that we received. So it was about \$40,000 or something is correct me-

Suzanne:

A little under \$40,000.

Sunny:

... a little under \$40,000 so it was entirely paid for by the grant. So we kind of I would say are going to inherit this equipment for use. While I would say the USDA kind of gave us the grant, but we had to do a lot of paperwork submitting to the feds on what this equipment is. So that was the good I would say angle to it. We were able to hire two seasonal workers from the grant, as well as buy [inaudible 00:17:08].

Mario:

That's good. Other questions? Okay, thank you very much, Josh. Appreciate it [inaudible 00:17:17].

Josh:

Thank you everybody.

Mario:

On to health and safety update, so good news.

Sunny:

Yes, I'll open it up with I would say I'm going to hand over the baton to Liz on this.

Liz:

Hi, everyone. Just quickly, Amanda, our manager of environmental health and safety, she created the memo. Just in terms of what it talks about is as RWA being proactive versus reactive. We did a lot of research with best in class safety programs. What we found is that what RWA is doing today is working and effective. However, we're still not at our zero injury initiative. So we're continuing to drive programs that are driving awareness for before our employees start in the day such as stretching and just a reminder about slowing down. Working at a pace that is reasonable and healthy to the employee and if they need a two-man move, they need to make sure that they have the time to get another additional help. We're also creating information for the customers when they're going into these homes as they visit there to making sure that those environments are safe for our teams to go into. We've also implemented a P365, a nurse hotline so that way in the event someone is injured, they are getting the correct care right from the get-go so nobody's holding off.

They are being advised on which avenue to go down, whether it be ER or self-care. A couple of other things that she talked about is our audits and inspections, so our onsite inspection to ensure that our workplaces are safe and up to code. We're also focusing on the commercial side of the business as well to make sure those operations are OSHA compliant and are being signage and everything is up to par.

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Everything else is pretty much standard in there with statistics and numbers, but if you have any additional questions, let me know.

Mario:

Questions? You will note that there is no injuries in our commercial business group, which is good news. I appreciate you putting that in there. Including them as a separate grouping, although they are out in the field and networking, so that's good news. And has RWA had any questionable areas, facilities where they've called in the Connecticut OSHA for a courtesy inspection?

Liz:

In our commercial businesses or overall?

Mario:

No, just-

Sunny:

For the utility.

Mario:

... the utility side.

Liz:

Oh, the utility side? No, I'm trying to think of months back we had an OSHA incident. Jim could probably, he might be able to talk but nothing that-

Jim:

So Liz, we actually did have Conn OSHA come into Lake Gaillard Water Treatment Plant to do an inspection and provide some feedback on what we could do better there. They couldn't cover the entire campus in one visit, so we took their recommendations. A lot of them were related to paperwork kind of thing and we're going to have them come back and try to complete the whole campus and then after that we'll probably move to the next one. It's always good to work with the regulators hand-in-hand and get some input as opposed to having them cite you on something that you should have been doing.

Mario:

Yes, no, that's very good. Thank you [inaudible 00:21:19]. Any questions? Thank you very much. Okay, environmental-

David:

Motion to adjourn and reconvene as the Authority. Second.

David:

Second.

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Mario:

All those in favor?

Committee members:

Aye.

[ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING ADJOURNS AT 2:20 P.M.]