



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Customer and Community Services Committee Meeting

*Thursday, February 12, 2004
1:00 pm
810 First Street, N.E.*

Meeting Minutes

Board Members

Alexander McPhail, Chairman
David J. Bardin
Stephanie Nash
Michael Dutton

Staff

Jerry N. Johnson, General Manager
Wendy H. Moore, Interim General Counsel
Charles Kiely, Customer Service Director
Paul L. Bender, Chief Financial Officer
Michael S. Marcotte, Chief Engineer
Linda R. Manley, Board Secretary

Mr. Alexander McPhail, Committee Chairman called the meeting to order at approximately 1:20 pm.

Lead Service Line Update

Mr. Jerry Johnson stated that there had been two hearings held for the City Council's Committee on Public Works and that quite a bit of behind the scene work is being conducted with regard to dealing with the lead service lines issues. Mr. Johnson noted that the staff has begun meeting on a daily basis to review daily activities and to make any necessary adjustments to address new data or issues as they arise.

He noted that Mayor Williams has appointed a special task force to bring together District resources along with the Authority to look at the problem and understand issues and concerns of the citizens of the District. The scope primarily is communications, protocols, and responses.

Mr. Bardin asked if the Mayor issued a document that outlined the task force's functions. Mr. Johnson stated that there is such a document, however he was unsure as to whether it has been finalized. Mr. Bardin asked that the document be e-mailed to the Committee once it has been finalized. Mr. Johnson stated that he would check to see if he had a copy of the draft document with him and if so would have copies made and distributed today.

Mr. Johnson noted that one of the headings of this document is "Authority" and outlined under this item it specifically states that nothing that this group does, recommends or says is intended to or can interfere with the authority of DCWASA, City Council or Executive Branch of government. The task force consists of representatives from the Mayor's office, City Administrator, Councilmember Carol Schwartz, Councilmember Linda Cropp, Councilmember Sandy Allen, Glenn Gerstell, Department of Transportation, Department of Health and himself. Other entities will be called in as deemed necessary. Mr. McPhail asked if the task force had any working guidelines, for example how often are

they expected to meet. Mr. Johnson noted that the task force will meet weekly and that the first meeting is scheduled for February 13th. A report from the task force is due on April 9th.

Mr. Johnson stated that the Authority has brought in some additional resources to assist with Public Relations surrounding this issue. Beverly Silverberg and Equals Three (contractors) have been working with the Authority for the past week assisting us with writing, getting out press releases, preparing a response to the unpleasant article that appeared in last Sunday paper, etc.

Mr. Johnson noted that the Authority will start testing the DC Public School System this coming weekend and that test results should be available at the end of March.

Because of the different views on health impacts of lead in drinking water, the Authority has been in contact with the George Washington University School of Public Health and look to finalize the arrangements for their involvement. Mr. Johnson stated that his view is that it is more beneficial to have an institution involved as opposed to individuals primarily because their views differ so widely around the lead issues particularly the health impact. He also noted that DC Delegate Eleanor Norton and Congressman Tom Davis have agreed to hold a hearing to discuss EPA's role and involvement with this issue.

Command Center Lead Service Update

Mr. Johnson stated that the staff was very unhappy about where the Authority stood last week with the Lead Service Hotline under the direction of the contractor. There were about 1,700 emails that were backlogged; another 2,000 or so calls that were also backlogged on tape and had not been addressed; and there were not enough phone lines.

The staff took immediate steps to established an emergency Command Center which has been wired and set-up so that we can instantly set up telephone lines and computers and coordinate appropriate staff.

Mr. Johnson pointed out that all of the backlogged emails were addressed over the past weekend and the backlogged calls have been addressed as of February 10th. He also noted that employees have been pulled from a variety of different Departments including Department Heads and Senior Staff.

Mr. Bardin asked what message are WASA employees giving out to the customers. Mr. Johnson stated that Mr. Kiely would be addressing that issue in his report.

Mr. Johnson introduced Ms. Pat Wheeler as the Interim Public Affairs Director. He stated that she brings a wealth of professional experience and knowledge to this position and has the capacity to hit the ground running in that she knows the media. He further stated that Ms. Wheeler would be able to take on a number of functions and to hopefully get the Authority ahead of the curb on some of the issues we have been dealing with. Mr. Bardin asked where Ms. Wheeler lives. Ms. Wheeler responded, Washington, DC.

Mr. Kiely stated that the Command Center was initially set up on Thursday, February 5, 2004. That involved setting up a telephone system, computer terminals, establishing network connections, training and mobilizing work force, establishing hours of operation, developing standard operating procedures, developing scripts, and eliminating backlogs.

Mr. Kiely stated that when the staff initially took over this function there were over 2,000 calls on tape that had not been addressed. From Thursday, February 5th to Wednesday, February 11th the Command Center has had 8,781 new contacts. Mr. Bardin asked if the staff had any way of knowing whether the customers have called at other times or called twice. Mr. Kiely answered yes.

Mr. McPhail summarized by saying we may have had 5 to 6 thousand customers contact the Authority prior to implementation of the Command Center and now when someone calls we are entering the information into our Customer Service database, which creates history of the activities surrounding the lead issue on individual accounts. Mr. McPhail asked how many people do we have working the phones and what is the capacity for call per hour. Mr. Kiely replied that we are handling an average of 1,200 calls per day and twelve people on staff during hours of operations. Mr. Kiely pointed out that the Command Center hours of operation are Monday through Friday, from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm and Weekends and Holidays, from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Mr. McPhail asked what is it that we are telling customers. Mr. Kiely replied that we are asking for the address, name on the account, check database to see if service type is recorded, and if not schedule mailing for test kits.

Mr. McPhail asked if someone wants to have a test kit even if WASA's records indicate that they do not have a lead service would we still send them a kit. Mr. Kiely replied yes. Mr. Bardin asked what if they live in an apartment. Mr. Johnson stated that in some cases the Authority has asked tenants to have their management contact the Authority because we can't do a reasonable test from one unit. If the apartment manager wants to do a test, then the Authority will work with them to perform the test.

Mr. Bardin asked if a resident in an apartment wanted a test kit would WASA say yes or no; and what if she stated that she was pregnant would you say yes or no. Mr. Kiely stated that what we are telling all apartment dwellings is that they need to contact the property owner or management company and that we will coordinate a test with the Authority's Engineering Department.

Mr. McPhail asked what is the Authority going to do next and how many test do we have pending. Mr. Johnson stated that perhaps this was a good time to explain the process. The Authority has a process with an engineering firm (Baker-Killiam) who transfers every call to a database managed by that firm. The engineering firm will then track with their database all the test kits that were sent out. The firm has very specific guidelines for tracking test kits – they have two working days to get the kits out in the mail and two to three days to pick up the kits. Mr. Bardin asked what type of mailing is being used. Mr. Kiely responded that the contractor is using Federal Express. Mr. Kiely also stated that Baker-Killiam tracks who received a test kit. Finally, the customer calls the Command Center to schedule pick up. This information is given to Baker-Killiam who picks the kit up. Once the kit is picked-up that starts the count of the 30 days for return of results.

Mr. Kiely explained to the Committee the instructions detailing everything that customer has to do to include calling back to the Command Center to schedule a pick up.

Mr. McPhail asked how the customer receives the results. Mr. Johnson stated that a letter is mailed from the Authority.

Mr. McPhail asked if the letter is going to be closely coordinated with the task force. Mr. Johnson responded by stating that one of the actions being taken is that if a house test over 300 ppb, the Health Department is actually going out on a door-to-door basis to interview the family to determine if there are any children under six, pregnant women, seniors, etc. in the household. If so, then the family goes through a secondary screening process, which could include blood testing.

Mr. Bardin asked if the letter gives the customer a name and number of someone in the Health Department to call. Mr. Johnson stated that the Authority sent out a separate mailing to its customers providing them with the Health Department contact and information along with another EPA/WASA correspondence back in September 2003. Mr. Bardin suggested that Mr. Johnson consider sending out a new round of letters that should include some reference to one's own health care physician and a number to call.

Mr. Bardin asked if the instructions in the kit are for the EPA protocol of two samples. Mr. Marcotte responded that's correct, they are for the EPA protocol. The first draw is the one that has been stagnant in the kitchen tap over night. The second draw is the one where water has run after a significant change in temperature. EPA's protocol does not include a test on a third draw, people don't believe that running the water for any significant time (taking a shower, etc) really does any good and WASA's credibility goes down.

Mr. Bardin asked if there was a way to get away from EPA's protocols except for the mandatory 200 samples; get a protocol that is geared to WASA and the District of Columbia, the needs of the Authority's customers. Mr. Marcotte responded, yes. Mr. Bardin asked how long would it take to do that. Mr. Marcotte stated he would think that we would either have to go to a three-bottle system or just go to a one-bottle system. With the one-bottle system, the customer would have to take the sample after they had flushed their system. Mr. Bardin stated that if the Authority is going to do thousands of samples following EPA's protocol we are going to find out six months from now that we have a lot of data that makes the system appear more dangerous than it really is. Mr. Johnson stated that once we get that data then the issue would be what do we do with it. He stated that the Authority is relatively comfortable with its own tests conducted on the water system at the various storage facilities. No test results were over 2 ppb. Mr. Marcotte stated that while it would be interesting to have data from a third sample, he could not foresee the third sample testing at only 2 ppb due to several factors, the length of pipe, the temperature, condition of the pipe, etc. It would be very possible for the sample to pick up additional lead particles while traveling through the service line.

Mr. McPhail stated that the question now becomes how quickly would the Authority be able to replace all of the lead service lines. He further stated that if the Authority could develop a policy to do a third test if a resident tests over a certain level. Mr. Marcotte stated that he agreed with Mr. McPhail's suggestion for possibly implementing a third sample system rather than sending three bottles to everyone. Mr. Bardin asked if chemical treatment of the water has been eliminated as a possible cause of the lead problem. Mr. Marcotte answered no, nor has the chemistry of the water been identified as the cause of the apparent increase.

Mr. Bardin pointed out that the DC Council has heard from three different medical professionals who have practiced medicine for over a decade and have all been advising their patients if you have lead in your house, run the water prior to consumption. Then they read about the second flush and now all are confused. He concluded that we have a credibility issue. Mr. McPhail responded stating that the Authority has approximately 130 samples that are over 300 ppb and asked how long would it take to get a third flush on these sample sites. Mr. Marcotte stated that it would likely take about a couple of weeks. Mr. McPhail suggested that the Authority proceed with a third draw testing system for these sites. Mr. Marcotte stated that the down side of proceeding with this system at this time is that it may make homeowners uneasy or more confused.

Mr. McPhail asked how many test do we have currently pending. Mr. Kiely responded that the Authority has generated 3,583 since the implementation of the Command Center and approximately 6,000 prior to that. Mr. McPhail stated that we could end up with about 10,000. Mr. Johnson stated that we would probably end up with considerable more than that. He noted that the Authority would be mailing out letters all of our customers who we believe have lead services on or about Wednesday, February 18th. We expect to receive a huge increase in requests for lead sample test kits (10 to 12 thousand).

Mr. McPhail asked how do we figure out the priority for replacing lead pipes. Mr. Johnson stated that the Authority has developed a prioritization list that actually quantifies the numbers that we think will be in the high-test categories. The list has been forwarded to the Health Department pending feedback. Mr. McPhail asked if that means the Authority will be replacing lead services one by one. Mr. Johnson noted that there would be three programs in place: The first includes the contract with C&F Construction that the Board approved in January 2004 for \$10 million, which will include

replacement block-by-block; The second involves the Department of Transportation who will replace all lead services within the blocks that they are doing major street repair; Thirdly, we would be replacing the individual services where there are extremely high levels of lead and there are children under six, pregnant women, seniors, etc. (about 500 or so services involved in this priority). Mr. McPhail asked if the only place we could speed up replacement of lead services is individual replacements with high levels of lead and if that was the only program the Authority has control over. Mr. Johnson noted that the Authority has control over the block-by-block replacements as well as the special cases.

Mr. McPhail stated that he would like to develop some proposals for Board action so that by the next Board meeting the full Board would have something to vote on. Mr. Johnson stated that he spoke to Mr. Gerstell on February 11th and that he requested that a Board meeting be established for next week sometime prior to the February 25th Council Hearing. As a result, Mr. Johnson has asked the staff to develop an array of options for the Board to review.

The Committee discussed the best way to address fast-forwarding the replacement process. Mr. McPhail stated that the committee should look at what measures could be undertaken very quickly and then take a look at the long-term measures taking into consideration those residents who cannot afford to replace their pipes at this time.

The Committee held a discussion on the recent correspondence that was mailed out to the customer. Mr. Bardin stated that he felt this letter would have been great for last summer or fall. He stated that the Authority needs another letter with a greater sense of concern recognizing that we care about thousands of pregnant women and mothers of small children. Mr. McPhail agreed that it is very important that WASA makes sure that pregnant women and mothers of children under the age six are aware and have information on what they can do regarding the lead issue. This should be one of the short-term measures along with concentrating on getting a third sample test for the 130 samples that have already above 300 ppb. Secondly, Mr. McPhail stated that WASA should be concerned about communicating WASA's current activities in terms of responding to this issue and how customers can get more information. Thirdly, WASA should be most concerned about the people who health professionals think might be most at risk.

Mr. McPhail stated that he is convinced that WASA's only option on the second part of the long-term measure is to replace every single lead service line whether it tested below or not and we need to have a program to figure out how to accomplish this task as soon as possible. A harder part of the long-term measure is finding a way to finance the portion of the service on private property. Mr. McPhail asked the staff to prepare a proposal on the above option and work out some figures to be presented to the Environmental Quality & Operations Committee meeting on next week.

On another matter, Mr. McPhail noted that he had a message from Mr. James Caldwell (Montgomery County) that WASA exceeded our NPDES permit over the weekend. Mr. Marcotte stated that it was a seven-day limit. It was an excursion related to a lot of ongoing construction. Mr. McPhail asked if this was bad news. Mr. Marcotte replied that it's not something that we would like to have happen but we had a lot of rain, snow melting, icing and construction. WASA will report the excursion; and we do expect to meet our monthly limit levels.

Mr. Bardin asked what, if anything, have the other counties done to assist the Authority through the issues involved in the lead crisis. Mr. Johnson stated that he received an immediate call from WSSC and they offered up their technical assistance, engineering staff and the use of their laboratory. Mr. Johnson noted that he had also been talking with Montgomery and Prince George's Counties who have both been supportive.

Detailed Update on IG's Report on Customer Service

The Committee held discussion on the IG's Report. Mr. Bardin noted that the Committee should receive a copy of the IG's press release and any other pertinent information. Mr. Johnson stated that whenever the IG's report is negative, they don't do a press release, the information is leaked out. He stated Mr. Hemphill has talked to Adam Maier of Carol Schwartz staff and to personnel in Adrian Fenty's office regarding the same.

Mr. McPhail stated that the Committee would still like to see the plan for dealing with government relations.

How do we Expand Call Response Capacity to Meet a Rapid Change in Demand

Mr. McPhail stated that he inquired and was told that, during the cold weather spell in mid-January, customers were sometimes waiting 20 minutes on the phone line

Mr. Marcotte noted that the calls tend to pick up when we have freezing temperatures for several days. Mr. Bender stated that WASA did have a problem during the freezing temperatures. He further stated that the question now is whether WASA has a series of issues that require bringing more people in during this period. Currently WASA does not have a formal procedure for this scenario, however we are able to pull additional personnel within 24 hours.

The discussion centered on generating specific informational messages to be placed on the system while customers are waiting for service. Mr. Marcotte gave the example of a pressure problem in an area of the city and stated that within six hours WASA can receive thousands of calls. An informational message placed on the phone system regarding an incident such as this could be very helpful in getting the word out to our affected customers. Mr. Bender also stated that a good thing to do would be to look at the scenarios under which the volume of calls increases and develop a formal procedure. Mr. Bender stated that the Customer Service Department would prepare a report on the existing and proposed procedures by April's meeting.

Mr. McPhail asked if we are moving forward with the Rates Committee Hearing. Mr. Johnson stated that when the lead issue surfaced we had already scheduled our community meetings and the public hearing and sent out notices regarding the same. In talking to the Board Chairman, we decided that this was not a good time to be discussing rate increases. Therefore, the meetings and hearing will be held as scheduled, however, subject will change from retail rates to talk about the lead issue. A revised schedule will be prepared and forward to the Board next week. Mr. McPhail, with support from other Board members, stated that it has been the consensus of the Customer and Community Service Committee that the low-income renter program and related rate measure go forward as quickly as possible. It was also noted that the schedule of hearings and implementation for this rate item had been approved by the full Board of Directors and that it should not now be delayed without another resolution of the Board of Directors. The General Manager responded by saying he would confer further with the Board Chairman on this issue.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:20 pm.