

Tea-party activists charge into Arizona water panel race

by Shaun McKinnon - Oct. 10, 2010 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

No one runs for a seat on the Central Arizona Water Conservation District board for the glory. The position is unpaid. Meetings are long, the discussions often mundane. Many voters barely know the job exists until it shows up on the ballot.

Yet this year, the board appears to have become a "tea party" battleground.

In a reflection of how far political ideology has burrowed into elections, tea-party activists are gunning for a majority on the nonpartisan board that manages the Central Arizona Project, the state's largest single source of water.

Most of the tea-party-backed candidates lack experience in managing natural resources. They are campaigning almost solely on fiscal issues, arguing that the district needs to cut costs, rein in spending and reduce the property taxes levied in Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties to support water deliveries in the CAP Canal.

The activists say they can take control of the board if their "good government" slate of five candidates is elected on Nov. 2. The five, including one incumbent, would join an existing "Stop the Spending" coalition on the 15-member panel, which oversees the district's \$248 million budget.

The political drama is rare for what has been

one of the state's least-ideological elected bodies.

Several current and former CAP board members worry about the partisan tone of the race and say the coalition is too narrowly focused on micromanaging the district instead of setting broader policies.

Such an approach, they say, could become a distraction as Arizona and the other six Colorado River states work to secure future water resources amid concerns about growing demand, drought and the effects of climate change.

"Our board is a nonpartisan board," said Sharon Megdal, a University of Arizona water researcher who represents Pima County on the board. "We don't run with any party affiliation, and I think that's for a good reason. The issue of providing reliable water in a responsible manner is not a partisan issue."

Pushing for change

The lure of the CAP board - 14 people are seeking five open seats this year - is not easy to explain. Its members manage a

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significant resource, 1.5 million acre-feet of water a year, and set property-tax and water rates in Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties.

Yet they earn no salary and devote long hours attending meetings and poring over thick notebooks of background material.

The board is unlike most other water-management agencies in the seven states that share water from the Colorado River. The one board sets policy, negotiates future water resources on the river and sells water to cities and farmers, and its members are elected. In other states, water boards are more often appointed and rarely handle so many responsibilities.

The 15 board members are apportioned among the three counties that receive water and pay property taxes, with 10 elected from Maricopa County, four from Pima and one from Pinal. Five of Maricopa County's seats will be filled on Nov. 2; other seats come open every two years.

Since 1971, when the board was established, an eclectic array of people has served, some with impressive political pedigrees. In 1987, four former Arizona governors held seats at the same time: Jack Williams, Howard Pyle, Sam Goddard and Paul Fannin.

Sam Goddard's son, Terry Goddard, now the Democratic candidate for governor of Arizona, won election to the board in 2000, then resigned two years later after being elected attorney general.

Historically, the CAP board has set policy and given its hired general manager and his deputies leeway to run day-to-day operations and manage the budget, which in recent years has grown slowly, along with the workforce, which now numbers about

475 people.

The board seeks recommendations from the staff on water rates, which have increased to reflect rising delivery costs, and property-tax rates, which have been cut three times in the past 10 years.

The shift on the board started four years ago, when a slate of candidates, most of them new to water issues, upset four incumbents, including the board's president and its longest-serving member.

The newcomers had taken advantage of the board's low visibility and launched a grass-roots campaign using the Republican Party's organization to push their goals of cutting costs and reducing expenses at the district. Although short on water-resource experience, the candidates and their supporters had visited precinct meetings and other party gatherings with easy instructions: Vote for all the women on the ballot.

It worked. Maricopa County voters elected former state Rep. Jean McGrath, former Mesa City Councilwoman Janie Thom, businesswoman Gayle Burns and educator

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Pam Pickard, along with incumbent Lisa Atkins.

The four new members elected in 2006 wasted little time in their efforts to expose what they saw as wasteful spending and inefficient operational procedures.

They pressed staff members with questions about often-routine construction and maintenance contracts and began challenging the way money was spent in areas as diverse as building materials and employee travel expenses, though they lacked a consistent-enough majority to force significant changes.

Now, the activists are making it clear they aren't finished. In a widely distributed e-mail seeking support for the tea-party slate, McGrath said the 2010 candidates are dedicated to cutting costs. She singled out the district's policy to pay 100 percent of its employees' contributions to the state retirement system.

"These candidates, along with the few conservatives already on the Board, will have the votes to eliminate this unconstitutional idiocy immediately upon taking their oath of office," McGrath wrote.

Megdal, the Pima County board member, has voiced concerns at board meetings with what she and others see as micromanaging by the coalition members.

"The board hires a general manager who provides oversight of day-to-day operations," said Megdal, director of the University of Arizona's Water Resources Research Center. "Of course, we approve the budget, tax and water rates and set policy. The policy aspects of our job are very important. I do not believe it is our job to

micromanage."

Limited experience

Like the four conservatives who won election in 2006, the tea-party-backed slate brings limited experience in water-resource issues, particularly in contrast to other candidates on the 2010 ballot.

The exception is incumbent Mark Lewis, a water-resources consultant who also has served on the board of Salt River Project, the region's other major water provider. He shares the limited-government vision of the conservative coalition.

"We should remain very focused on delivery of cheap, clean water to cities, farms and tribes," he said. "We have one duty: To deliver water on a wholesale basis and conserve and store water for a non-rainy day."

The other four coalition-supported candidates are Cynthia Moulton, a retired nurse and tea-party activist; John Rosado, a retired software engineer also active in tea-party politics; T.C. Bundy, a business consultant; and Raymond Johnson, an insura-

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nice broker.

Outside the coalition are candidates with lengthy water-resource histories: incumbent Tim Bray, a water consultant; Sid Wilson, who retired in 2008 as general manager of the CAP; Jim Holway, a former Department of Water Resources regulator; Ray Jones, former president of Arizona American Water Co.; and Karl Kohlhoff, a longtime municipal water consultant.

Most of the non-coalition candidates see opportunities for the CAP to take a leadership role, both within Arizona and on the Colorado River, where the seven states are seeking to augment supplies with proposals such as a water desalination plant in Mexico.

Those opportunities shouldn't be ignored for partisan seasons, said Grady Gammage, a former CAP board member and a senior research fellow at Arizona State University's Morrison Institute of Public Policy.

"The CAP is the closest thing there is to a Sun Corridor institution," said Gammage, who has studied long-term growth and resource issues in the urban area that stretches from Phoenix to Tucson. "There is nothing that binds Phoenix and Tucson together except the CAP. That means it has a role in our future."

Gammage said he does not oppose reducing costs. Reducing property taxes, for example, could shift more of the financial burden of the district's operations to water users. But he and others worry that a narrowly focused board could ignore the bigger-picture issues and leave Arizona vulnerable in a drought or a water shortage.

"You could get someone on the board who

has little knowledge but who is willing to listen and learn," he said. "But if you have little knowledge and won't listen, that's a dangerous combination."

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Litchfield Park and Goodyear face water, sewer rate hikes

by David Madrid - Oct. 11, 2010 10:15 AM
The Arizona Republic

Litchfield Park and about half of Goodyear are facing a 72.6 percent water rate increase and an almost 50 percent sewer rate increase if a recommendation of an administrative law judge is approved by the Arizona Corporation Commission.

On Oct. 5, an administrative law judge, Dwight D. Nodes, recommended that Liberty Water Co., formerly known as Litchfield Park Service Co., receive a \$4.9 million revenue increase for water and more than \$3 million revenue increase for its sewer division.

Liberty Water serves about 16,000 water customers and 17,000 wastewater customers. It serves Goodyear residents and businesses north of Interstate 10, Litchfield Park, adjacent unincorporated Maricopa County and a few commercial customers in Avondale.

The rate increases must go to the Corporation Commission for approval. The next meeting of the commission is next Tuesday and Wednesday.

Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf and Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh want residents to attend the Corporation Commission meeting to speak out against the increases.

Neither mayor had time to analyze the recommendation's effect on their respective city but said the recommendation will hurt residents and businesses.

"I think it is absolutely amazing that they can come in with that type of increase," Schoaf said.

Cavanaugh called the recommended rate increase "out of this world."

"We absolutely need a great turnout of people objecting to this," he said of the Corporation Commission meeting.

The judge recommended a three-tiered system that will penalize large water users, which Schoaf said will significantly increase Litchfield Park's water bill and the bills of about half the residents who have large lawns.

Greg Sorensen, director of operations for Liberty Water's Western Division, said the judge balanced all the evidence in the case and in the end made a "good, but tough, decision."

"I think it was a fair one," Sorensen said of the decision. "I think there were things that could have been in the company's favor, but weren't decided that way by the judge. I'm sure there (are) things on the other side of the issues that they (cities) believed they

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should have received in the order and they didn't. I think the judge did an excellent job of balancing all the issues."

Schoaf said he doesn't understand how Liberty Water can justify raising rates so high when its costs haven't changed.

"The cost to deliver water today is not any different than what the cost was to deliver that water yesterday, but they are literally taking a rate increase of 70 percent absolutely, pure net profit," he said. "It goes right to the bottom line."

Schoaf said he was astounded that the administrative law judge thought Liberty Water deserves an 8.7 percent return on its assets.

"That is a tremendous return when you are a utility operating in an environment that has literally very, very little risk," he said. "We argued that their return should be significantly less than that. When you're a regulated utility which literally has no competition, and it's not in an environment where they have a significant amount of risk, all they have to do is come to work and run their business in a reasonable way, and they're guaranteed an 8.7 percent return. That's just quite high."

Sorensen said Liberty Water hasn't had a rate increase since 2002, and since then, there has been a significant increase in the cost of delivering water. He said the company had to comply with mandates to reduce arsenic levels.

"The cost of complying with that (arsenic levels) in capital was over \$11 million," he said. "The wastewater treatment plant, which provides services to the community, has never been paid for by customers. The cost

of that plant was never included in rates the customers were paying over the last eight years."

The wastewater treatment plant is the Palm Valley Water Reclamation Facility in Goodyear.

Liberty Water originally wanted a rate increase of about 120 percent and a wastewater rate increase of 81 percent. In January, the Corporation Commission held a public hearing at the Wigwam Golf Resort and Spa in Litchfield Park, and almost 500 people showed up to protest the proposed rate increases.

The Corporation Commission does not have to approve the administrative law judge's recommendation nor the recommendations of its staff. If the five-member board approves the increase this month, the new rates would likely go into effect Nov. 1.

The judge's recommendation proposes that rates be implemented in three phases over a year "to at least partially mitigate the sudden rate shock that will be experienced by (Liberty Water's) customers." The first phase increase would be a 50 percent increase for

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six months. Then a 25 percent increase would be implemented in the seventh month, and the final 25 percent would kick in after one year.

Because Liberty wouldn't collect the full amount of the increased rates during the first year, the judge recommended collecting the deferred increases plus 8.7 percent interest over three years through a separate surcharge.

Liberty Water is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Algonquin Power Income Fund, which owns energy, water, wastewater and related assets in the United States and Canada.

Liberty Water operates eight water and wastewater companies in Arizona as well as other water and wastewater utilities in Texas, Illinois and Missouri.

Liberty Water was previously named Algonquin Water Resources.

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Arizona Daily Star

State's sunshine, water, cow dung make perfect mix

AZ firm trying to cash in on algae biofuel

Rebecca L. McClay Cronkite News Service | Posted: Monday, October 11, 2010 12:00 am

CASA GRANDE - Take a little Arizona sunshine and mix in water and some cow manure.

It's the perfect recipe for what some see as the next major industry for the state: algae farming.

Arizona with its sunny, warm climate has been hailed as the ideal region for algae biomass production. Proponents hope that algae, which can contain up to 60 percent oil, can some day squeeze out a petroleum substitute that could be produced at a price low enough to compete with natural gas.

But first, researchers must find the best way to mass produce the crop, something that several companies in the state are hustling to do.

One Arizona firm, Phyco Biosciences, is banking on its agricultural-style series of plastic-lined troughs bubbling with oxygen and nutrients to commercialize algae biomass.

The Phyco system is different from the standard mass-cultivation process of growing algae in raceway ponds, shallow man-made ponds in a large ovals in a "raceway" formation. Those systems use paddlewheels to push the water, but they require heavy maintenance

Phyco's system sits on leased land on a 3,500-cow dairy farm in Casa Grande. A subsidiary of XL Renewables, Phyco first expects to glean profits from algae-based products like dietary supplements and animal feed before moving on to biofuel.

With ample amounts of wastewater and brackish water in holding ponds in the state, the algae culture business could be Arizona's next breakthrough industry, said Rep. Frank Pratt, R-Casa Grande. He attended a tour of Phyco's pilot facility.

"Anytime we can utilize arid land or utilize an area where we have some low-quality water and we can get production out of it, it's certainly worth looking into," Pratt said. "(Phyco Biosciences) may be pioneers, if they can perfect this technology and get it to where it's economical and they can produce energy," he said.

Now focused on growing the tiny plants on a mass scale, Phyco is also developing technology to harvest the algae, but CEO Ben Cloud declined to comment on specifics, citing proprietary information.

So far, the company has proved its trough system can yield roughly 25 tons of algae per acre each year, Cloud said. He said the state could produce much more algae if it had more water.

"The desert Southwest is an ideal place to grow algae biomass," Cloud said. "We don't have enough water, but in the areas where we do have enough water, we've learned how to manage it. ... We really do look at algae biomass as a crop."

The crucial part of the trough system is at the end of each trough. Unlike the raceways with their paddlewheels, the trough system has an air pump that draws the water from one trough to another, creating the aeration and constant flow that algae needs to grow. It also has a line that can pipe in fertilizer, which the company taps from the waste of the dairy farm.

"We need to do it on an economical scale," said George McNeely, Phyco operations manager. "We need to take it out of the lab but still have some of the controls to keep a good algae culture. To be able to cost-effectively harvest it, grow it and get it out to market."

Ira Levine, associate professor of natural and applied science at the University of Southern Maine, said the Super Trough System has the potential to reduce the cost of biofuels to a competitive and profitable level in the next 18 to 24 months.

"It costs a third as much as the classical raceways, uses half the energy and can be installed in a tenth the time," said Levine. "It's down to a level where biofuels is practical and doable. That's a remarkable advancement."



Tempe water, sewer rates to rise next month

by Derek Quizon - Oct. 12, 2010 10:37 AM
The Arizona Republic

Most Tempe and Guadalupe residents will see a 10 percent increase on their water bills starting next month.

A set of water and wastewater rate increases approved by the Tempe City Council in September will take effect Nov. 1. Residents served by the Tempe Public Works Department, including Guadalupe and some unincorporated areas near the city will be affected by the increases.

The median single-family home, which uses about 10,000 gallons of water per month, will pay an additional \$3.93 each month, public works Director Don Hawkes said. Single-family homes make up about 90 percent of the department's customers, he added.

Customers are charged on a tiered system determined by the amount of water they use. Single-family homes in Tempe and Guadalupe will now pay \$1.46 for the first 1,000 gallons, an increase of 27 cents. For an additional 7,000 gallons, they will pay \$1.83 per 1,000 gallons, an increase of 34 cents.

Customers of every classification will be affected. Multifamily households, for example, will see an increase of 16 cents per 1,000 gallons. Rates will go up by 25 cents for commercial establishments.

Monthly service charges for sewer usage will increase across the board as well. Most single-family homes will pay an additional

\$1.09 to \$1.50 in service charges, depending on meter size.

Water rates in Tempe likely will continue to rise for at least two years, Hawkes said. The rate increases are a response to changes to federal regulations set to take effect in 2012.

When chlorine and other disinfectants are added to water, they can react with minerals in the water to create compounds called disinfectant byproducts that increase the risk of bladder cancer and other health problems. The Environmental Protection Agency tightened regulation of those byproducts in 2006. Hawkes said that led to higher costs that are being passed on to customers.

The city is also trying to replace much of its aging water infrastructure, he said, another factor contributing to rate increases.

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Contaminated water has Southwest Valley cities on edge

by David Madrid - Sept. 29, 2010 11:03 AM
The Arizona Republic

In the Southwest Valley, there is a growing plume of contamination that moves with groundwater flows and threatens drinking-water wells critical to three cities.

Officials in Litchfield Park, Avondale and Goodyear say the growth of the plume doesn't bode well for the cities and that cleanup efforts haven't been adequate.

The Phoenix Goodyear Airport superfund site contains two contaminated plumes, divided into north and south.

The north plume is growing.

Avondale official: Avondale's water system is safe

While Litchfield Park is afraid the plume may impact its Tierra Verde Lake, a popular fishing area, Mayor Thomas Schoaf also worries about the city's drinking water.

"That's the big concern, because it (plume) is moving toward drinking-water wells that are run by Liberty Water and moving toward drinking-water wells that are the main drinking-water wells in Avondale," Schoaf said. "So it's a very serious problem."

Liberty Water provides water to Litchfield Park, Goodyear north of Interstate 10 and some unincorporated areas.

If the plume reaches the Avondale wells, it could become a very expensive problem, said Wayne Janis, Avondale's water resources manager.

"We are not yet directly affected by the plume, but if the plume should affect us, it will affect a very important part of the water supply for Avondale for the next 50 to 100 years," Janis said.

"An alternative to using groundwater would be using surface water, and that would require building a water-treatment plant that would cost the citizens of Avondale \$80 (million) to \$100 million to supply water. If you figure that currently, there are 80,000 citizens in Avondale, that's quite a bit of money per citizen."

Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh said the plume is moving from Goodyear toward other cities. Goodyear has shut down four wells over the past 10 years because of the contamination.

"We've had the problem since the early '80s that it's been recognized as a problem, and it's only been the last five or six years that there's been significant attention placed on

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it," Cavanaugh said. "But attention to 'let's get this resolved; let's stop the flow,' we haven't done that yet. Once we've got control of the plume, then we need to start emphasizing the eradication of it."

Plume site a national priority

Both plumes originate in Goodyear, but the Phoenix Goodyear Airport south plume has been largely contained.

The source of the pollution in the north plume was Unidynamics Phoenix Inc., which was established in 1963 as a research, development and manufacturing plant for defense and aerospace equipment.

The plant basically disposed of its waste by dumping it into dry wells and unlined oxidation ponds.

Most of the contamination is trichloroethene, more commonly called TCE, which is a solvent. But there are more contaminants that were generated by the plant in the soil and groundwater such as toluene, acetone, methanol, cobalt nitrate, ammonium carbonate, perchloric acid and oil.

The Arizona Department of Health Services discovered the groundwater contamination in 1981, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency added the site to the National Priorities List in September 1983.

Cities unhappy with cleanup

Crane Co., which now owns the site, is conducting the cleanup under the authority of a consent decree signed in June 2006. The company, based in Stamford, Conn., manufactures highly engineered industrial

products.

The cities complain that Crane hasn't taken the plume as serious as they would like, and that frequently, it drags its feet when it comes to the plume.

"Crane Co. is a very efficient and profitable company," Janis said. "It runs many businesses by a business model that is very profitable, and they make a lot of money. It would seem that if they treated the contaminated plume as they would treat any other business . . . that they would be a lot more efficient in containing, correcting and eliminating the contamination so that they would . . . not have to worry about the pollution and could make money."

Janis said that compared with the profits Crane makes, the money it spends on pollution control is "just a drop in the bucket."

Schoaf said the consent decree governs the relationship between Crane and the EPA and gives the EPA a variety of powers, which it hasn't used as effectively as it should.

"It appears that they (EPA) are becoming

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more aggressive," Schoaf said. "I think they are starting to realize that if they don't do something, this thing is going to continue getting bigger and bigger and bigger."

Crane spokesman Richard Koch said the company has no comment.

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Gilbert water supply emerging as critical issue for Town Council

by Parker Leavitt - Oct. 5, 2010 10:02 AM
The Arizona Republic

With about a decade left before Gilbert's demand for water eclipses its annual output, the Town Council on Monday discussed its options for securing enough of the precious resource to allow for projected population growth.

Gilbert currently gets most of its water from the Salt River and Central Arizona projects. Other sources include the Roosevelt Western Canal District and well pumping.

Although water use has dipped recently - now running 10 to 12 percent below projected demand - Water Resources Administrator Kathy Rall doesn't expect that trend to last.

By the time Gilbert reaches build out, the town will need about 81,000 acre feet of water per year, Rall said. One acre foot can serve two families for a year, she said.

Residential usage puts the largest strain on the municipal water supply, and Gilbert's population is expected to grow by at least 100,000 people over the next couple decades.

To prepare for the expansion, officials earlier this year secured a one-year lease for water rights from the San Carlos Apache Tribe for 20,000 acre feet of Central Arizona Project water per year.

That deal came at a cost of \$2.9 million,

which is paid for by system-development fees.

Another contract with a Native American community is on Thursday's council agenda. The proposed agreement could give Gilbert nearly 14,000 acre feet in water rights from the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation at an annual cost of about \$2 million.

The unused water can be "recharged" into the aquifer in exchange for long-term storage credits. Gilbert can then use those credits when rising demand eclipses the available supply.

Thursday's council meeting begins at 7 p.m. at the Gilbert Municipal Center, 50 E. Civic Center Drive.

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ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Broken sewer line affecting pedestrians at border

Posted: Tuesday, October 12, 2010 8:15 pm

A broken sewer line in Nogales has resulted in the temporary closure of the pedestrian gate at the Morley port of entry.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials say the Morley port will remain closed until repairs on the sewer line are completed.

Resources from the Morley port have been moved to the DeConcini pedestrian crossing to help facilitate travelers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Public works crews on both sides of the border are working to complete repairs as quickly as possible.

City officials say damage is limited to a breach in a manhole that provides access to a pipe carrying more than 13 million gallons of sewage per day to the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Smuggler's tunnel one possible reason for Nogales sewer backup

The Associated Press | Posted: Monday, October 11, 2010 8:00 pm

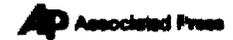
NOGALES, Ariz. — There's a sewer backup in Nogales on the United States side of the border.

City officials say damage is limited to a breach in a manhole that provides access to a pipe carrying more than 13 million gallons of sewage per day to the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant.

City Manager Shane Dille says crews on both sides of the border were working Monday to stop the flow in the line to assess the situation.

Dille says there are at least two possible scenarios — a smuggler's tunnel, or the sewer line may be leaking and has ultimately bored a hole which initially looked like a tunnel.

Photo shows apparent leak before Hungary spill



By PABLO GORONDI, Associated Press Writer

47 mins ago

BUDAPEST, Hungary – An aerial photo taken months before a gigantic reservoir unleashed torrents of toxic sludge shows a faint red trail trickling through the container wall — part of a growing body of evidence that inspectors who gave the pit a clean bill of health may have missed warning signs.

Police were examining the photo Tuesday as part of an investigation into how part of the wall containing the 10 million cubic meters (350 million cubic feet) of caustic slurry could have given way without structural weaknesses being detected by a team of inspectors from the government environmental agency who inspected the container pond less than two weeks before the spill.

Disaster commissioner Gyorgy Bakondi, appointed to the newly created post Monday night, said Tuesday the inspections were under investigation, including claims by environmental inspectors that "they had found everything in order."

As the police probe gathered steam, judicial authorities scheduled a court appearance for Zoltan Bakonyi, the managing director of MAL Rt., or the Hungarian Aluminum Production and Trade Company, the company that owned the reservoir, to decide whether he should be formally charged, if so, with what, and whether he should remain in custody.

The photo showing an apparent leak of red sludge on the northern wall of the reservoir — the same wall that partially collapsed eight days ago — was taken by Interspect, a Hungarian company specializing in aerial photography that invests some of its profits on environmental projects, such as taking photos of locations in Hungary which could be at environmental risk.

Interspect director Gabor Bako said he shot the photo June 11, nearly 4 months before the spill. He said the company shared the photo with universities and environmental groups "but no further steps were taken in the matter" until the wall collapsed freeing the caustic muck that flooded three west Hungarian villages about 170 kilometers (just over 100 miles) from Budapest before being carried by local waterways into the Danube River.

Although Interspect found many suspicious sites around the country, "we're not construction engineers or specialists who could interpret what the picture showed," he told The Associated Press, still hoping to gather experts who could review the photos.

Bakonyi, the managing director who was taken into police custody Monday, was scheduled to appear at a preliminary court hearing Wednesday convening at Veszprem, a western Hungarian city about 45 kilometers (27 miles) east of the partially collapsed containment pond.

A police statement issued Tuesday suggested Bakonyi was guilty of negligence, saying he did not prepare an emergency warning and rescue plan to be implemented in case of an incident like the sludge spill.

There was no official information on what Bakonyi told police, with law enforcement officials declining to divulge details on the progress of their investigation a week after the start of their probe. By Tuesday night, police had not made promised return calls to the AP.

But according to the daily Blikk, which is considered to have good police connections, a lead engineer at MAL Rt., told police that the firm's top management was aware — but kept quiet — about the risks of a breach of the reservoir for an unspecified period.

The tabloid also revealed that in the 1980s, before the fall of the Iron Curtain, Bakonyi's father, Arpad Bakonyi, was the head of the environmental department at the ministry of industry — a predecessor of the present-day inspectorate — and received several state awards for his work.

In an initial reaction after the spill, Zoltan Bakonyi said the reservoir was patrolled daily and "did not show any physical signs that something of this nature could happen." But Prime Minister Viktor Orban suggested that preliminary investigations revealed negligence playing a part.

"We have well-founded reasons to believe that there were people who knew about the dangerous weakening of the reservoir wall, but for personal reasons they thought it wasn't worth repairing and hoped there'd be no trouble," Orban said.

Bakondi, the disaster commissioner, said that police had taken over security tasks at all premises belonging to the company and that production at the plant could restart during the weekend, although a final decision had yet to be made.

Bakondi leads an 18-member supervisory committee, who will have to approve practically everything happening at MAL from now on.

The government rejected claims that it was using the disaster as an excuse for ruling by

decree.

"This is not the nationalization of the company," government spokeswoman Anna Nagy said. "It is placing it under government supervision until the catastrophe is resolved."

Asked, however, what activities the company could carry out without the consent of the supervisory board, Bakondi answered, "Nothing."

A corner of the reservoir at the alumina plant in Ajka, 160 kilometers (100 miles) southwest of Budapest, the capital, collapsed last Monday, releasing an estimated 700,000 cubic meters (184 million gallons) of a highly caustic byproduct of alumina production, which is then used to make aluminum.

The Ajkai Timfoldgyar plant, which began operating in 1943, was sold to private investors in the 1990s in the wake of the collapse of communism.

MAL has a 12 percent market share in Europe of alumina production and 4 percent globally.

It says it spent 30.3 billion forints (\$153 million) in the past decade on maintenance and renovation work.

Media reports say it had revenues of nearly 29 billion forints (\$147 million) in 2009 and 50 billion forints (\$253 million) in 2007.

Associated Press writer George Jahn contributed to this report from Budapest

Los Angeles Times

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Storm-water runoff: Malibu's elegant solution

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When Malibu's new central park opens Saturday, visitors will see sculptures of a giant king snake and burrowing owl covered in jazzy mosaic tiles. And those who stroll the park's decomposed granite pathways will observe hillocks, 500 freshly planted trees and cyan-colored patches of mulch and seeds that should grow to resemble coastal prairie.

Less obvious, however, will be the park's reason for being: reducing water pollution. Buried beneath visitors' feet is a sophisticated network of pipes and filters engineered to remove bacteria, metals and trash from the storm-water runoff that has long contaminated Malibu Creek, Malibu Lagoon and the point break at Surfrider Beach.

The \$38-million Malibu Legacy Park is considered to be the centerpiece of the city's commitment to clean water, a commitment that coastal activists say is welcome, if long overdue.

The Civic Center site had been targeted for development by Malibu Bay Co., owned by media magnate and part-time Malibu resident A. Jerrold Perenchio. After several proposals went nowhere, the city raised \$25 million to buy the property, known locally as the Chili Cook-off site for an annual Labor Day weekend festival held there for many years. The city then had to amass \$13 million more to build Legacy Park and the storm-water treatment facility.

Among high-profile contributors to the project were Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks, Don Henley, Rob and Michele Reiner, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Marilyn and Jeffrey Katzenberg Family Foundation. Additional funds came from Santa Monica College bond money, Los Angeles County and the State Water Resources Control Board, with which Malibu recently wrestled over the issue of septic systems. Donors' names adorn tiles and wooden benches placed throughout the site.

The park is bounded by Pacific Coast Highway, Webb Way, Civic Center Way and the shopping areas along Cross Creek Road. After native plants grow in, the area will feature a variety of habitats: coastal prairie, coastal bluff,

woodland and riparian. The landscape is designed to attract coyotes, California quails, red-tailed hawks, Western toads and other critters that have abandoned once-wild lands.

Vernal pools, a creek and a storm-water retention basin will hold water only during rainy times. Park trees include such native varieties as California live oak, sycamore and cottonwood, while man-made hills provide visual interest and muffle the noise from vehicles roaring by on PCH. Scattered throughout are outdoor classrooms where students will hear presentations from docents.

Even before runoff from the Malibu Creek watershed enters the park, screening equipment will capture food containers, paper cups and other detritus, said Bob Brager, Malibu's public works director. The water will then flow through a bio-filtering creek to a retention basin where sediment can settle.

Next, gravity will draw the water to a treatment facility on the north side of Civic Center Way, where it will be filtered and disinfected with ozone. Finally, it will be pumped back to the park and used for irrigation. City Manager Jim Thorsen calls the park and plant an "environmental cleaning machine" capable of treating about 2 million gallons a day.

With the park's limited vegetation, the eight giant mosaic sculptures of creatures are certain to grab attention. Fabricated at a plant in Redding, they were decorated by Robin Indar, a Northern California mosaic artist, and her team. (For more information and photos of the sculptures, visit [Indar's blog](#).)

One environmental leader expressed regret that Legacy Park would not also treat wastewater, as the city had initially proposed. Studies showed the site did not lend itself to sewage treatment because it contained relatively impermeable clay. "I feel like Malibu missed an opportunity to make a really huge difference," said Liz Crosson, executive director of Santa Monica Baykeeper, which unsuccessfully challenged the project in court. Crosson added that she fears the site could be overwhelmed in particularly rainy weather.

State water quality officials recently approved a moratorium under which Malibu must wean itself of septic systems in the Civic Center area and adjoining neighborhoods and build its first central sewage treatment facility.

Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay, agreed that it was unfortunate the park could not accomplish both goals but said he sees many positives. "From an urban planning perspective, this provides Malibu with a center, which they've always needed," he said. "It's environmentally themed, has native plants and provides storm-water abatement."

Legacy Park is at least a start, said Tracey Hanson, a Malibu resident since 1979. "It's been such an eyesore, and it's nice to see something beautiful," she said. As for the storm water, she added, "better it's treated there than in our oceans."

--Martha Groves