

SENATE Bill 1171 has passed the Arizona State Senate and is now in committee hearings in the House. What has not been addressed at any level of disclosure or transparency is the cost Marana ratepayers will incur as an additional expense for sewer or wastewater service if this legislation is signed into law and Marana executes their desire to operate their own separate wastewater system.

The costs to Marana residents are significant and substantial. These costs will be borne solely by Marana wastewater ratepayers unless Marana subsidizes their wastewater system to a significant extent using either revenues from their water utility or subsidizing the wastewater utility operation from the Marana General Fund using sales taxes or other fees.

Pima County's Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department is a stand-alone revenue utility and does not receive any cross revenue subsidy from sales taxes, property taxes or any other special revenue fundraisers. All costs are paid by the users of the county regional wastewater utility.

The discussion below details the additional costs that will be incurred by Marana ratepayers if SB 1171 becomes law.

### The Marana Wastewater Reclamation Facility

The Marana Wastewater Reclamation Facility (WRF) has recently been expanded: both for capacity and water quality treatment standards. This upgrade cost regional taxpayers approximately \$30 million, with a portion of the cost funded through sewer obligation revenue bonds and a portion paid using pay-as-you-go financing.

The plant has a present capacity of 700,000 gallons per day (gpd), even though only 230,000 of gpd is actually treated at the facility. Because of the lower volume, this facility is one of the more costly wastewater reclamation facilities to operate in Pima County; it has an average operating and maintenance cost for treatment of approximately \$4,142 per acre foot per year (afy).

SB 1171 would purport to repay the county for taking the facility by simply paying the outstanding bond debt. This would be an unfair under-reimbursement to regional ratepayers for their present investment. The value of a utility asset has nothing to do with its remaining outstanding debt. Standard practice for utility asset valuation indicates this is clearly inappropriate and would not represent real or market value for the assumption of a utility asset. Such a scheme would be unconstitutional and subject to legal challenge.

What is fair and appropriate is to deduct the amount of revenue that has been received from those who have connected to the

## County News



**Chuck Huckelberry**  
Pima County  
Administrator

Marana WRF from the actual cost of constructing the facility paid for by regional taxpayers. These connection fees equal approximately \$6 million; hence, the remaining reimbursable cost would be about \$24 million. This would be a bargain because if market value is used, which is the most common valuation practice in utility law, the value would be higher. For purposes of argument, we will value the asset at the amount that would fairly compensate regional ratepayers for this investment: \$24 million.

It is assumed the repayment of the \$24 million could be financed over a 15-year period with an approximately six percent interest rate, which would mean the Marana sewer system would have to pay a capital expense for the next 15 years of \$2,471,000 annually. Given the current number of sewer ratepayers living within the town limits of approximately 12,000, these ratepayers would pay approximately \$17.16 per month in addition to their monthly costs for wastewater service to purchase the Marana WRF from the county for the next 15 years.

### Excess pumping costs

To avoid the high cost of capital to build an additional treatment plant at a new location, the sewage from Dove Mountain, Continental Ranch and Continental Reserve is pumped back to the Ina Road WRF. These pumping facilities have been in place for years. Initially, they were constructed by a developer, however, due to lack of development activity, the facility was inoperative for a number of years before there was an actual need for its use. Due to this lengthy period of inactivity, the county was required to invest over \$2.1 million in rehabilitation and code improvements to make the pump station operational. In addition, this year, the county is scheduled to invest an additional \$3.1 million in the Continental Ranch pumping station to ensure continued reliable service. This \$5.2 million capital investment would also have to be recovered from Marana wastewater ratepayers as they are the only users of

this asset.

Today, the county operates within our system a total of 29 pump stations; six of these stations are within Marana. The largest operational cost of a pump station is the energy cost of pumping wastewater. The entire budget within the Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department for wastewater pumping stations is \$1.4 million. Approximately 36 percent, or \$504,000, of the annual expenses associated with the facilities are incurred in operating the Marana pumping station.

Under SB 1171, Marana wastewater ratepayers would assume these costs. Rather than pumping costs being spread equally among 262,000 regional wastewater customers, the costs would have to be paid by the approximately 12,000 Marana wastewater customers. Again, assuming the \$5.2 million capital investment in the pumping facilities serving only Marana wastewater users with 15 years of repayment at the present rate would equal \$535,392 per year, or \$3.72 per customer per month.

Marana wastewater customers would also be paying the operating and maintenance costs, which average over \$504,000 annually for the wastewater pumping facilities, which is equal to \$3.47 per customer per month. Adding these two costs together results in an additional cost that Marana wastewater customers will pay equal to \$7.19 per month.

### Ina Road treatment cost upgrade to meet permitting requirements of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality by 2014

The county is presently investing over \$327 million to upgrade the Ina Road WRF,

primarily to meet new water quality standards imposed by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. The treatment modifications are for the removal of nitrogen and ammonia from the effluent. Another major capital improvement is also occurring with the replacement of the Roger Road WRF for the same purpose with a total project budget of \$285 million. Recently, a contract valued in excess of \$165 million was awarded for this project.

Most of the wastewater generated by Marana residents and businesses is treated by the Ina Road WRF. Approximately 10,500 connections flow to, and are treated by, this facility. The remaining Marana connections, approximately 1,500 are treated at the north Marana WRF. The 10,500 connections for Marana residents that discharge to the Ina Road WRF will be required to pay their share of the capital costs for the upgraded facility.

Overall, the number of wastewater connections that flow to the Ina Road WRF is approximately 105,000; hence the percentage of capital repayment that would need to be made by Marana residents is 10 percent of the total. This total capital investments of \$327 million, spread over 15 years at an interest rate of four percent, county stable and improving bond rating has lower interest, equals an annual payment of \$29,410,740. Marana's fair share of this cost would be \$2.9 million, or \$20.42 per customer per month.

The county's presently scheduled rate increases would have covered this debt service cost, and much of this additional cost was to be recovered in future rate increases over the next three years. However, if Marana established their own wastewater utility, it is unclear how these costs will be recovered. The costs for the newly built Ina Road WRF would have to be absorbed by Marana cus-

tomers in some manner. Marana cannot escape these Ina facility upgrades simply by creating their own wastewater utility.

### Regional wastewater treatment cost

Presently, all residents connected to and receiving wastewater treatment from the county pay an average, overall regional cost of service. This is how most regional wastewater and water utilities structure their user rates. Pima County has 11 wastewater treatment facilities, and the actual acre-foot per year cost of treatment at each facility varies widely from a low of \$468 at the Roger WRF to a high of \$139,000 at the Mount Lemmon facility. Today, the cost at the Ina WRF is \$720, and the cost of the Marana facility is \$4,142. The average system-wide cost is \$664.

An analysis of 2009/10 actual audited financial reports for these treatment facilities indicates that if the 12,000 Marana customers had to pay all of the Marana WRF operating and maintenance costs and 10 percent of the Ina WRF operating and maintenance costs, their monthly costs could increase by approximately 21 percent.

Overall treatment costs represent approximately 50 percent of the average typical monthly sewer user bill; hence, it is likely Marana residents will see an average monthly increase of approximately \$3 in their sewer bill simply because they no longer receive the average blended cost of service provided by the regional county system.

### Total costs

The Marana residents or businesses that pay wastewater fees will see a significant increase in their wastewater bills if SB 1171, sponsored by Senators Antenori, Griffin and Melvin, and Representatives Gowen, Judd, Stevens, Vogt, Williams and Proud, is approved and signed into law by the governor. Today, Marana residents enjoy the economy of scale pricing of a regional wastewater utility.

In total, Marana ratepayers, at least for the next 15 years, will have to pay nearly \$48 per month more than they do today if SB 1171 passes. This excludes any costs Marana will face in the near term to pay for growth obligations for new connections. These costs must be passed on to Marana residents and wastewater ratepayers within Marana unless the Marana mayor and council decide to substantially subsidize their wastewater utility through higher Marana water charges or direct subsidies from the Marana General Fund through sales tax or other revenues.

Clearly, there are significant, measurable and real costs that accompany Marana's desire to become a wastewater service provider that could be avoided. In fact, the benefits to Marana residents appear insignificant based on the county offer to return all effluent generated by the Marana Water Utility to Marana. We have repeatedly asked for supporting cost and rate information from Marana and nothing has been provided. Their fiscal analysis of this matter appears inadequate.

## On This Day

March 23

1806 - Explorers Lewis and Clark, reached the Pacific coast, and began their return journey to the east.

1957 - The U.S. Army sold the last of its homing pigeons.

1989 - A 1,000-foot diameter asteroid missed Earth by 500,000 miles.

2001 - Russia's orbiting Mir space station plunged into the South Pacific after its 15-years of use.

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## MARANA NEWS

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We will print letters endorsing political candidates. However, we will not print letters from the candidates endorsing him or herself.

All letters must bear the handwritten signature of the writer and include address and phone number for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be published. Letters should be typed or legibly handwritten, and any letters chosen for publication do not necessarily reflect the editorial policies or beliefs of this newspaper.



Tucson Weekly

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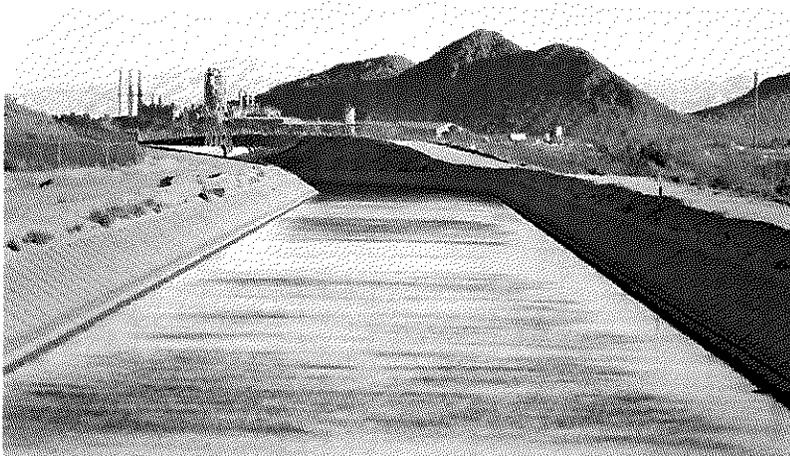
CURRENTS - FEATURE

March 24, 2011

# Quality vs. Quantity

## Will Tucson Water spend more to increase the water supply—or will it spend more to improve the product?

by Dave Devine and Molly McKasson



**F**or at least a century, water policy in Tucson could be summed up in two words: *Get more.*

Accordingly, for decades, Tucson Water over-pumped our aquifer while spending millions on a reclaimed-water system to use treated sewage for non-drinking purposes.

For the last 20 years, the municipal utility has also embarked on the costly delivery and storage of lower-quality Colorado River water, with a total annual allotment of 144,191 acre-feet. (An acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons of water, enough to supply two or three households with water for one year.)

As a result, Tucson Water's customers have seen their bills go up, and their water quality go down.

Yet today—perhaps for the first time in its history—Tucson Water appears to be relatively awash in water. Thanks in part to conservation-minded community efforts, the most recent available figures (see the table) show that total water demand is decreasing and is currently far short of the Central Arizona Project (CAP) allocation.

Some argue that this excess of water gives the utility the financial flexibility to finally address long-ignored CAP-water-quality concerns—in particular, its high level of total dissolved solids (TDS).

Others, however, take a different perspective.

Andrew Quigley, acting director of Tucson Water, believes the decline in water pumpage is just a short-term phenomenon.

"We need to look at a 100-year continuum," he says about population growth. "A decade is just a little bit of time. Anything's possible, but I can't conceive we won't continue to develop and grow."

SAMANTHA SAIS

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SAMANTHA SAIS



Ward 6 Tucson City Councilman Steve Kozachik agrees.

"I'm not buying those trends (of stagnant growth and reduced water usage) to make water policy on," he says. "It's not prudent to think usage will be going down when the economy flips, and we start to grow."

On the other hand, water use has declined over the past decade, even though the population served by Tucson Water grew an estimated 10 percent. In part, this gap is the result of significant conservation efforts on the part of the community, starting with the Beat the Peak program. In 2000, average usage was approximately 180,000 gallons per household annually, but by last year, that figure had declined to around 145,000 gallons.

Tucson Water's widening gap between CAP resources and potable demand doesn't include any of the approximately 50,000 acre-feet of groundwater that can be pumped by the utility under state law. (Nor does it factor in credits and other water-calculating devices to which the utility is entitled.)

The difference in supply and demand also doesn't include the amount of water that has been "banked" by the utility. Last June, Tucson Water told the City Council that the utility had about 44,000 acre-feet of banked potable water available.

When recently asked by the *Tucson Weekly* what that number is now, officials declined to comment.

Despite the apparent abundance of water, per City Council policy and a "use it or lose it" mandate, Tucson Water is poised to soon take its entire CAP allotment, some of which it will have to bank, at no small cost to ratepayers.

"Water security is my top priority," reflects Ward 3 Councilwoman Karin Uhlich. "It seems unwise to forgo that ability (to bank excess CAP water) to protect existing residents."

The *Weekly* attempted to contact Mayor Bob Walkup and Ward 5 Councilman Richard Fimbres for their comments on water issues, but neither responded before this article's deadline.

Uhlich recognizes that the lack of population growth and the flatter water usage presents a new reality for Tucson.

"I don't think many people have thought of (the new realities)," she says. "It's an interesting perspective, and to pause right now makes some good sense."

**A** decline in demand isn't what Tucson Water's long-range plan predicted when it was last updated in 2008. The forecast then was for total water consumption to be at least 150,000 acre-feet by 2010, increasing to between 180,000 and 220,000 acre-feet within 20 years.

But the economic recession, the collapse of building construction, the negative perception of Arizona and other factors have resulted in a slowdown or possible reversal of Tucson's population growth.

Rob Kulakofsky, a member of the recent City/County Water and Wastewater Infrastructure, Supply and Planning Study Oversight Committee, isn't so sure that current growth trends will turn around anytime soon.

"We will have boom and bust periods into the future," he speculates, "but my sense is the 'go-go' years of growth—with its associated impractical to deceitful financing—are over for at least 10 to 20 years."

Nonetheless, the search for new water appears to be a never-ending thirst. At the same time, different variables enter into the equation regarding how much supply and demand there will be for Tucson Water's product in the future.

On the supply side, one of those factors is the amount of Colorado River water the utility could receive if the current drought continues. While dire forecasts show substantial drops in the flow of the Colorado (see "Fluid Situation," March 6, 2008), in the short term, those predictions aren't panning out.

As Mitch Basefsky, spokesman for the Central Arizona Project agency that oversees the CAP canal, states: "Right now, there is such a good snowpack in the Rockies that things look good. There probably won't be any issues until 2016."

Even at that point, municipal and industrial users would be the last groups to see reductions in access to CAP water. According to a Central Arizona Project report released last month, which reviewed possible declining flows on the

Colorado River, municipal and industrial users would not be affected even at the most drastic shortage levels.

Despite that, Basefsky candidly admits: "Of course, tomorrow, the river could dry up, and all the snow could melt. ... We don't want to leave out any means that could possibly help us through a tough spot."

One of the possibilities the agency is looking into is increasing the amount of water in the Colorado River by using the controversial method of cloud-seeding.

"We are helping to fund research with Utah and Colorado on snow-making projects," Basefsky says. "That's the cheapest way to augment the water in the river."

Tucson Water is also looking at buying more water from the Acquire, Develop and Deliver (ADD) water program of the Central Arizona Project agency. This proposal is aimed at securing more CAP and other water resources for the state.

Kozachik believes the city should encourage the use of salt water from the Gulf of California on crops in the Yuma area, therefore freeing up the CAP water those farms presently utilize.

"That could be a game-changer," Kozachik says, "and let us think about water from a standpoint of abundance."

**Y**et considering a decrease in demand and a questionable growth trajectory, shouldn't Tucson Water also be looking out for its current ratepayers?

"Lower usage gives us flexibility and options as we go into an uncertain future," says Tucson Water's deputy director, Sandy Elder.

At the same time, falling water use will almost certainly result in increased rates for Tucson Water customers. As a utility, Tucson Water must balance its books. That's why in the past five years, water rates increased substantially, rising about 37 percent. As a result, the typical customer now pays substantially more than in 2006, even though that customer uses considerably less water.

The impact has been an apparent financial strain on many Tucson Water customers. Water-bill increases, combined with the even greater hikes in Pima County wastewater charges, as well as the economic downturn, have resulted in huge increases in households either being delinquent on their monthly utility bills or not paying them at all.

In the past five years, annual delinquent accounts have risen from 116,700 to more than 200,000 in 2010. In that same period, turnoffs climbed from 11,200 to almost 18,000.

The number of people utilizing Tucson Water's emergency low-income assistance program hasn't quite kept pace. The number of households participating in the program went from 1,310 in 2007 to 1,879 last year.

The turnoff and delinquent-account figures surprise a lot of people. "I hadn't heard that," confirms Jim Horvath, a member of the city's Citizens' Water Advisory Committee (CWAC).

Tucson Water's higher rates aren't only being driven by a lower water demand. Long-delayed maintenance of the water system has been a big, ongoing expense. In addition, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) expects the utility to pay for pipeline-relocation needed during roadway construction, which amounts to a major expenditure—an anticipated \$40 million over the next five years.

This is a cost Kozachik vehemently opposes, because it wasn't presented to the voters in 2006 when the RTA was approved. "Tucson Water should have that \$40 million in its cookie jar," he insists.

Also driving costs up are three other variables. One is an in-lieu property tax imposed by the City Council last year. Another is the questionable administrative decision to have Tucson Water fund the city's annexation efforts.

Finally, even in these difficult economic times, the utility is striving to keep a 10 percent cash reserve account. (The impact on rates of increasing the cash reserves was another question Tucson Water officials chose not to specifically answer.)

If Tucson Water moves forward with its proposal to bank more excess CAP water, that could also drive bills up, since

ratepayers would be buying a product they may never use.

On the other hand, Kulakofsky observes: "Banking water for the future, especially in light of the unsure future of Colorado River flows from climate change and variation, is a prudent way to manage our future."

Uhlich believes the community understands that acquiring the entire CAP allocation is a safety measure and is not intended to promote continued sprawl. She points to the City Council's decision last year to set a firm Tucson Water service area boundary.

"It's very significant," she says of the boundary, "because it tells everybody we don't have a Manifest Destiny destination."

**T**o help keep water rates down, the City Council could elect to utilize more CAP water instead of banking it, and therefore reduce the growth of its expensive reclaimed-water system.

This program, which treats sewage water before using it for landscaping and other non-potable uses, was established almost 30 years ago and accounts for more than 10 percent of Tucson Water's current supply.

Over the course of the next five years, \$20 million in spending is proposed on this system, including capital expenditures of \$13 million for reclaimed source development, and almost \$2 million for new lines.

Why spend this money when cheaper CAP water is available for use?

"We should always apply reclaimed water when we can to preserve the potable supply," suggests Uhlich. "Residents don't want to see potable water used where reclaimed can be."

Several years ago, in a move to meet projected demand, the utility was even considering using highly treated sewage water for potable purposes. (See "From the Toilet to Your Tap," Dec. 8, 2005.)

That contentious program won't be needed anytime soon, confirms Chris Avery, Tucson Water's chief water counsel.

"The decline in usage since 2004 set the timetable for a decision back several decades," Avery says. "... The necessity of using effluent is less urgent, and the need to make (a decision about it) in the next decade is absent."

Meanwhile, Tucson Water, for the foreseeable future, will continue to need to bank the unused balance of 30,000 acre-feet or so of CAP water, and this will drive up rates even more, since the cost of purchasing the water is \$137 per acre-foot.

Given the high cost of water-banking, it seems prudent to ask: How long should the City Council continue to support a policy of endlessly pursuing new sources of water, and how much water should be stored for a sustainable future?

Uhlich doesn't have an answer. "Maybe we could store our annual CAP allotment over a three-year period," she suggests. "But is that enough?"

Horvath thinks banking as much CAP water as possible makes sense.

"We should bank the balance (of unused CAP water)," Horvath says, "because we never know when shortages could occur. ... There's not a good reason not to take it."

**N**ow that Tucson Water appears to be awash in water, wouldn't ratepayers' money be better spent upgrading the quality of CAP water, and delivering a better product?

Tucson used to be known for its high-quality groundwater. Excessive population growth, however, resulted in an over-pumping of groundwater that led to potentially dangerous land subsidence in the central part of Tucson.

To address that critical issue, and to convert to a so-called "renewable" water source, in the 1990s, Tucson Water began the slow conversion from groundwater-pumping to the delivery of CAP water. One of the results of that transfer has been an increase in the total dissolved solids (TDS) in the water, also known as water hardness.

Tucson's groundwater had a TDS level of less than 300, while CAP water presently comes in around 600.

The utility currently obtains a TDS average of about 450 by recharging CAP water into the Avra Valley aquifer, but that process is gradually raising the TDS level in the groundwater there.

The higher the TDS level, the quicker particulates damage pipes, appliances and plants. It can also lead to negative health consequences for some people.

The federal government has recognized these issues and set a secondary, or nonmandated, standard of 500 TDS in drinking water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, these secondary standards "are established only as guidelines to assist public-water systems in managing their drinking water for aesthetic considerations, such as taste, color and odor."

Of course, there is a cost to keep the TDS level of CAP water below this figure, which is why Tucson Water embarked on a community-wide process several years ago to help frame the issue.

Referred to as Decision H2O, the question of what TDS level—450 or 650—will be in our water has been kicked around without resolution. It has been debated so long that some Tucson Water staffers refer to it as "Indecision H2O."

During a January interview, Elder, Tucson Water's deputy director, told us that is about to change. "It's collected a lot of dust," Elder says of Decision H2O, "but we've dusted it off. The numbers need to be revisited; then we'll take it to the City Council sometime this summer."

Thus far, the City Council has supported raising water rates for the never-ending acquisition of new water. In light of stagnant growth and declining water usage, our elected officials now have a clear opportunity to consider improving the quality of the water we currently have. Allocating money for the additional filtration required to deliver CAP water at a 450 TDS level would be a demonstrative sign that Tucson Water prioritizes both quality and quantity.

How much more expensive would the 450 TDS level be? Tucson Water officials aren't saying. All they would say in a recent e-mail is: "As we have discussed, we are currently re-evaluating the numbers and expect to provide this information to mayor and council in early summer."

For her part, Uhlich believes: "Banking CAP water and acquiring our full allocation is a higher priority (than quality)." But she expects the public will want to invest in both an increase of our CAP-water supply and an increase in water quality by having CAP water at a 450 TDS level.

Kozachik takes a somewhat different perspective than Uhlich.

"The 450 level is affordable right now," he says. "It needs to be affordable, because people have legitimate concerns about what they're drinking."

In addition to a decision about water quality, the City Council will soon need to decide on an update of Tucson Water's long-range plan.

The current plan is based on three basic policy statements, one of which is: "Acquire additional water supplies to increase reliability and meet future demand."

To accomplish that, the plan compares four different future scenarios, all of which assume substantial growth in water usage. That hasn't been the reality for 10 years, so wouldn't it be wise in the next update to incorporate a fifth, "no-growth" scenario?

Uhlich thinks so. "I'm not opposed to multiple scenarios," she says. "It's almost foolish not to do so."

That would be a radical change. It would mean the consideration of rewarding—instead of punishing—Tucsonans for their remarkable conservation efforts.

Evan Canfield, chair of the Citizens' Water Advisory Committee, is ready to look at the "no-growth" option. An avid promoter of conservation, Canfield thinks that through greater efficiencies, building-code improvements and increased water-saving efforts, a no-growth result could be reachable.

"It's somewhat ideal, but achievable," he says.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**County's management of wastewater services**

Dear Editor,

Contrary to Mayor Ed Honea's recent guest opinion dated March 16, 2011 alleging that Pima County's wastewater services system has not "...been run properly," a quick check of the facts show that the opposite is true. Pima County has a stellar, verifiable record of operating 11 wastewater treatment plants and 3,500 miles of conveyance lines in our system to serve our 750,000 customers. The facts are:

- The wastewater service connection and user fee rates through 2008 were below \$20 per month and among the lowest rates in the U.S. for communities of our size thus allowing this region to provide quality service at the lowest possible cost, which is attractive to new businesses interested in moving to our region.

- Decades ago, Pima County appealed the federal and state regulatory authorities' insistence that its two major treatment plants be upgraded at significant expense. In conjunction with other arid western states, Pima County developed and submitted scientific data, proving that the national "cookie cutter" approach to establishing water quality standards proposed by the federal government was inappropriate for this region. The 20 or so years of postponing federally mandated expenses allowed us to maintain extremely low service fees.

- In 2007, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality agreed to a plan for upgrading the two major plants that allowed for ample compliance time to plan, design, finance and construct these upgrades without the need for increased expenses due to unrealistic State mandates.

- Pima County undertook extensive planning and preparation for launching the largest

public works project to date that involves upgrading our two metropolitan treatment plants and interconnecting them for maximum flexibility in managing the service demands. These efforts were supported by financial planning that resulted in the Board of Supervisors authorizing a series of rate adjustments that have given assurances to our financial rating agencies of proper fiscal management that has yielded high ratings and lower interest expenses for our debt financed improvements.

- To date, Pima County has saved approximately \$60 million from the originally budgeted amounts for the entire Regional Optimization Master Plan (ROMP) program based on advance commodity purchases and innovative project delivery approaches, and we are ahead of schedule for completing the required upgrades. How many projects sponsored by public agencies can make and document that statement?

Mayor Honea suggests that we could have set aside the necessary funding for the upgrades that are underway. Attempting to "set aside" \$800 million for such improvements is, simply, not fiscally prudent. I am sure the Mayor's own Town of Marana's budget reserve policy does not reflect a similar standard.

The mayor also mentions a 300 percent increase in monthly sewer service bills over 10 years through 2013. In fact, the user fee rates over the last 10 years have gone up \$19 per month or an average of \$1.90 per year. The major share of this increase in fees has occurred in the last three years to address the need to finance major improvements that are now under construction.

The phenomenon of wastewater rates being higher than

potable water rates is a fact of life faced by many communities throughout the United States. The suggestion that proper management of the wastewater system could avoid this condition reflects either a lack of knowledge or recognition of the national trend that has been underway for the last 10 years with the increasing emphasis on improved water quality standards and the replacement of the aging infrastructure to support such processes.

The Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department is the recipient of numerous awards for quality business practices and high standards of regulatory compliance. These include the International Organization for Standardization certification for the Conveyance Division (ISO 9001:2000 which specifies requirements for a quality management system, ISO 14001 which addresses various aspects of environmental management, and OHSAS 18001 which addresses health and safety standards and requirements); over 34 National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) water quality awards including 10 Silver, 20 Gold and 4 Platinum Awards since 2004 and was most recently recognized for the creative planning and management with the 2010 NACWA National Environmental Award.

The facts speak for themselves. The Pima County wastewater system is an extremely well-managed utility that is closely overseen by the Pima County Administrator's Office with clear guidance and policy direction from the Pima County Board of Supervisors.

**Jackson Jenkins, Director  
Pima County Regional  
Wastewater Reclamation  
Department**



# Bodies of workers found at Gatlinburg treatment plant

By the CNN Wire Staff  
April 5, 2011 9:38 p.m. EDT



Two missing after sewage tank collapse

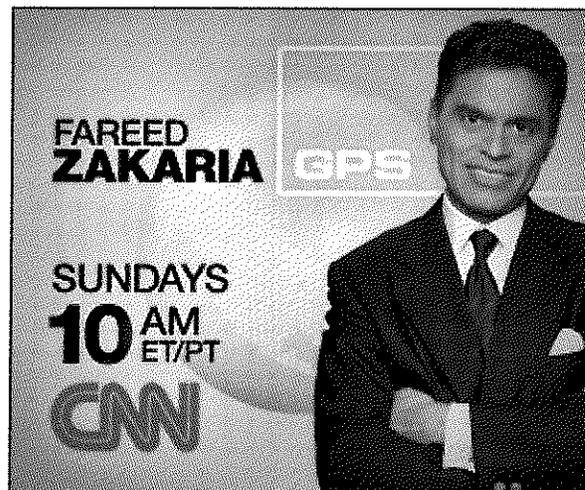
(CNN) -- The bodies of two workers at a Gatlinburg, Tennessee, wastewater treatment plant were found late Tuesday afternoon under a wall that had collapsed, sending sewage into the Little Pigeon River, officials said.

Gatlinburg Fire Chief Greg Miller identified the victims as John Eslinger, 53, and Don Storey, 44, employees of contractor Veolia Water North America.

"Employees and officials of both the City of Gatlinburg and Veolia Water are expressing deepest sympathies to the families and are extremely saddened to lose co-workers and good friends," according to a joint statement.

The cause of the collapse remained under

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investigation.

The wall of a containment basin collapsed Tuesday morning at the Gatlinburg Wastewater Treatment Plant, dumping at least 1.5 million gallons of sewage into the river, according to the state's Emergency Management Agency.

The wall collapse involved an overflow storage basin for liquid waste that commonly inundates the plant after a heavy rain, according to Tisha Calabrese-Benton, a state Emergency Management Agency official.

The basin was not completely full, so it is not known exactly how much sewage was released. Calabrese-Benton said the plant continued to release incoming sewage into the river.

The search for the employees included the river.

A mudslide occurred about one mile from the facility, several hours before the wall collapse, Gatlinburg City Manager Cindy Ogle said. Rain moved through the area overnight Monday.

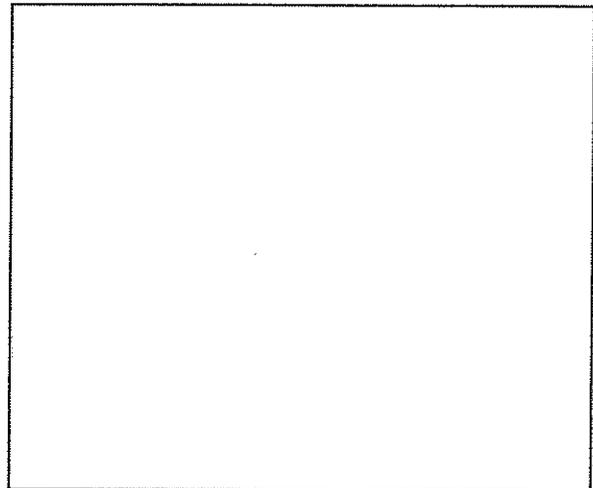
Crews put up signs to warn tourists away from the Pigeon Forge River, which was already under advisory because of previous concerns about bacteria, according to Calabrese-Benton.

Gatlinburg, a gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains, is a popular mountain resort city. Attractions including whitewater rafting, golf courses, hiking trails, an arts and crafts community and a conference center.

CNN's Aaron Cooper contributed to this report

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# MARANA WEEKLY NEWS

## Mayor says future looks brighter every day

By Chuck Barth

MARANA — Business and community leaders learned about the state of the town last Friday.

Marana Mayor Ed Honea gave the annual state of the town address at the Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain. The event was organized and sponsored by the Marana Chamber of Commerce.

"Marana's future is looking brighter every day," Honea told the crowd of over 300 on hand for the speech and lunch. "We have accomplished a lot, even in these hard times. I hope you leave here today sharing my enthusiasm for Marana's future."

"The state of our town is excellent," the Mayor continued. "Those of us who serve Marana's citizens work hard every day to reach that goal. Our business leaders and residents deserve a local government that finds innovative ways to work both with and for you. Opportunities exist around every corner."

Honea talked about the accomplishments that have highlighted the past year like the Twin Peaks overpass. He recognized Congresswoman Gabby Giffords' aid Ron Barber for helping to secure funding for the project. The lunch was one of Barber's first outings as he recovers from gunshot wounds he received back in January at Giffords' Congress on your Corner event.

Before the speech, Barber said he was still undergoing physical therapy and had not returned to work. He seemed eager to get back to the job. He

and his wife received a warm round of applause when they were recognized by Honea.

The Marana Health Center was another focus in the speech.

"It provides services to thousands of people from across the region," said Honea. "A new 74,000-square-foot facility is proof of the demand for those services. The town believes in quality healthcare. We have supported the project in many ways. All that cooperation is paying off. The new building will be dedicated May 21 across the street from the Marana Municipal Complex."

Honea said that the future needs to focus on creating jobs to keep the town's economy in good shape. He talked about the recently completed economic roadmap that was completed with help from community and business leaders. Last week the plan received a national award from the American Planning Association. Honea added that it was chosen for quality and initial results.

"One of those results was the Marana Job Creation Incentive Program," said Honea. "A company that creates jobs by relocating or expanding in Marana generates construction revenues. The Marana Job Creation Incentive Program sets aside those revenues for three purposes. One, the company's new employees get relocation incentives to purchase homes in Marana. Two, the company may beautify its landscaping by enhancing its landscaping along the Interstate 10 corridor. Finally, the company may



Oro Valley Mayor Salish Hiramath, left, congratulates Marana Mayor Ed Honea after this year's State of the Town Speech. Honea is seen here with his wife, Jan.

provide internship and training opportunities for Marana's high school or college students."

Sargent Aerospace was the first company to take advantage of the program. Construction is well underway on a new expansion of the company's plant near Cortaro Rd. and the Interstate.

"Public and private sectors can work together for the benefit of all who live in the region," Honea said. "Marana is living

proof of that. We work with solid partners. FL Smith, Krebs and Lasertel are two companies that plan to expand their operations in Marana. They complement our community's vision and values. They provide quality jobs for our residents."

Honea talked about new businesses moving to Marana and about the PGA's decision to return the Accenture March Play Championship to the town

for another year.

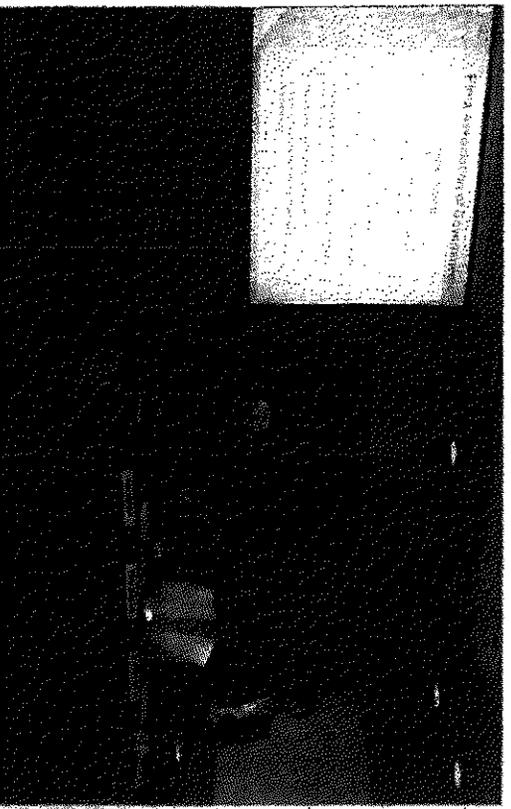
The subject of water and taking control of wastewater was also brought up. Honea talked about Senate Bill 1171 saying, "Every city and town outside of Pima County operates its own sewer utility. Legislation was introduced this year to give Marana the same ability to own and operate its sewer utility. This legislation, Senate Bill 1171, will allow local decisions to be

made by local decision-makers. What does this mean for you? Marana's control of its sewer utility will make us a one-stop destination for development."

In closing the mayor recognized the leadership of the town council by introducing current members.

Honea spoke for a little over 25 minutes and was interrupted by applause many times throughout the speech.

# Community learns about plans for Marana to control wastewater



Dan Jackson, left, Thom Martinez, and Dorothy O'Brien wait to make their presentations at the public hearing about Marana wastewater on Wednesday night.

By Chuck Barth

**MARANA** — The town of Marana along with the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) held the final public hearing about Marana's desire to take control of its wastewater. The Amendment for the town is to provide the necessary authority to obtain Designated Management Agency (DMA) Status and to construct and operate new water reclamation facilities in Marana within Pima County.

The town offered two experts consultants who have worked extensively over the past few years to testify at the public hearing. Thom Martinez, of Westland Resch, talked about 24 sewer basins in the town that should be considered. Martinez used data collected by the second consultant for the town, Dan

Jackson, of the economist.com, to estimate the cost of a full system. Martinez said it would take a budget of \$54.6 million for the first 10 years of the project. Jackson said that the cost to rate payers would be equivalent to what Pima County would be charging over the same time. That amount includes about a \$2 per year increase in rates.

After the two presenters representing the Town of Marana spoke, the floor was opened for public comment. First up was Jackson Jenkins, from the Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department. His PowerPoint presentation was aimed at dissuading Marana and its potential wastewater customers from going ahead with plans for a separate treatment system.

One of Marana's major issues with the Pima County Wastewater system is the lack of ability to handle new clients in a timely manner. Jenkins said that this was a problem with the state and that he expected a positive resolution in about eight months.

When he was finished other members of the audience spoke. Former Town Utility Manager, Brad Despain said, "If you reach the people the proper principles, and let them govern themselves, they are successful. And that's the point where we're at folks. Free water on a percentage basis is not free water. So it's time for Marana to control its destiny and let the people govern themselves."

Marana Council Member Roxanne Ziegler spoke directly to the council's presentation.

See WASTEWATER, page 7

## Bluegrass Music and Arts Festival set for this weekend

**MARANA** — Crossroads at Silverbell Park will be filled with the sounds of bluegrass this weekend.

The Southern Arizona Arts and Cultural Alliance in partnership with the Desert Bluegrass Association will present the inaugural Bluegrass Festival in conjunction

with the second annual Marana Arts and Crafts Festival, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the park.

The festival will showcase 16 bluegrass performances beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Regional food vendors as well as nearly 100 of the

regions best visual artists in every medium and genre will exhibit original creations of jewelry, pottery, painting and more.

The bluegrass program will run from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. both days. Admission is \$5, Kids 10 and under are free.

## Osprey Marines to be remembered Saturday

**MARANA** — There will be a memorial service, at the Marana Regional Airport beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, April 9, to honor the 19 U.S. Marines who were tragically killed in an MV-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft accident at the airport on April 8, 2000.

Mike Flynn, Commandant of the Marana Nighthawk 72 Detachment #1344 Marine Corps League, said that the ceremony will include posting of colors

by the Marine Corps, wreath laying by various organizations, guest speaker Col. Griffin, CO 375, rifle salute, flags bagpipe and vocalist, Marine Amanda Paquette.

The public is welcome to attend the event. The MV-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft was conducting training mission in support of Operational Evaluation (OPREVAL) when it went down at the Marana Regional Airport on April 8, 2000. Dur-

ing the mission, the crew and Marines conducted Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations exercises as part of the Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course with Marines embarking and disembarking the aircraft.

The Osprey crashed at the Marana Regional Airport. The accident spurred the military to change pilot training and today the aircraft flies for the Marines as a regular part of operations.

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**TERRIFIC WEEK**  
Mountain View huffers have a terrific week

TEACHER, STUDENT HONORED



Courtesy photo

Aaron Karrer, Mountain View High School student, was honored last Thursday night by the MUSD Board for his selection by the Arizona Athletic Trainer's Association to receive the Lanny Williams Award - High School Athletic Training Student of the Year. Karrer was selected as one of the top athletic training students in the state. Aaron received a \$500 scholarship at the Arizona Athletic Trainer's Association awards luncheon in February. In the fall, Karrer will begin attending Northern Arizona University. Leah Oliver, Mountain View High School teacher and certified/licensed athletic trainer was also honored for being selected by the Arizona Athletic Trainer's Association to receive the Certified Athletic Trainer Service award. Oliver spends countless hours at Mountain View High School. She has attracted future trainers to her program through her expertise and personality and most importantly, through word-of-mouth from her former students. Oliver's dedication is evident from the 17 MVHS students who have received the Lanny Williams Award - High School Athletic Training Student of the Year award since 1990.

Community learns about plans for Marana to control wastewater

WASTEWATER from page 1

"Had Marana had control of its wastewater we would have never shut down businesses," said Ziegler. "We would have planned for that eventually. And to blame it on the state, that our capacity is not right. And to tell those businesses and development that the county has an issue with the state and we're sorry but you can't come into the town of Marana, that is absolutely wrong. It's a perfect example of why we need control of our own wastewater." Another resident of Marana,

Susan Ong, was equally fed up with the lack of progress because of problems providing sewer hook ups.

"I've been involved as a land owner in getting development going and there are a lot of people who have invested a great deal of money in development and then everything has come to a screeching halt," said Ong. "They are told there's no sewer capacity... you're telling us here that there's plenty of capacity but we can't do anything to develop our capacities. We want to be better planned than Tucson. We want to do the best that we can."

But if we can't have sewers we can't have anything."

With the end of the meeting came the end of the comment period for a wastewater system in Marana. The measure will now go on to another committee, which is scheduled to meet this month. Then it's on to the state in June for a final yes or no vote.

The town's decision to manage and control water resources is supported by a 1986 Marana Water and Wastewater Service Voter Referendum, the 2007 Marana General Plan and the 2009 Marana Strategic Plan.

HOP



Children and parents wait in line for some movie popcorn before the showing of "Hop" Saturday morning at the Tower Theaters. The young people had the chance to follow a "sandy trail" collecting goodies from around the theater. It was a bit like Halloween but with an Easter theme.

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## House backs allowing Marana to take over county sewer plant

Howard Fischer Capitol Media Services | Posted: Friday, April 8, 2011 12:00 am

PHOENIX - State lawmakers voted Thursday to let Marana wrest control of a sewage treatment plant from Pima County.

SB 1171, given preliminary House approval, would give the rapidly growing community the unilateral authority to purchase the plant whether the county wants to sell it or not. It does not require the town to pay the fair value of the plant, only to pay off any remaining debt.

The legislation, which already has Senate OK, would overrule a court ruling which has so far thwarted Marana's efforts. Only a final roll-call vote remains before the measure goes to the governor.

"This is about local control," argued Rep. Vic Williams, R-Tucson.

At the heart of the battle is that Pima County - and only Pima County - is permitted to operate a county-wide sewage treatment system. Normally, that responsibility falls to each city.

Rep. David Stevens, R-Sierra Vista, said Marana residents voted more than 20 years ago to withdraw from a 1979 intergovernmental sewer agreement. Stevens, whose district includes part of Marana, said that should have allowed Marana to opt out and take possession of the sewage treatment plant that now is within the town limits.

But when Pima County balked, the issue eventually wound up in a lawsuit, with a judge ruling the town could not take over the plant. Stevens blamed that ruling on "some of the antics" by county officials.

One of those, he said, was declaring the area around the sewage plant to be a county park, precluding the city from taking it over.

"At some point, there was a picnic table chained inside there," Stevens said. "I have yet to see any children playing there or some swings there," he quipped.

But part of the ruling is because of a special state law which makes Pima County responsible for all sewage operations. This bill, in specifically allowing communities to opt out, would amend that law.

Part of the fight is about money.

Under the terms of SB 1171, Marana would be required to assume responsibility for all remaining debt on the sewage treatment plant. But there is no requirement for the town to pay Pima County for the current value of the asset.

That provision concerned Rep. Russ Jones, R-Yuma.

"All of the taxpayers (of the county) have been paying off on bonds," he said.

Jones said he doesn't have a problem with carving out part of the system for Marana to own and run. But he said it has to be financially fair.

"I want to make sure in my mind that all the balance of the taxpayers in Pima County, given the present-day value of their investment over the years in those same bonds, that they're going to be made whole on that," he said.

But Sen. Frank Antenori, R-Tucson, who wrote the legislation, said he sees no reason for a cash payment. He said Marana residents have been paying hookup fees, impact fees and sewer bills all along.

There's one other element to the fight: Who controls - and gets credit for - the effluent. That relates directly to the ability of communities to have an adequate water supply to support future development.

Rep. Bruce Wheeler, D-Tucson, attempted unsuccessfully to amend the legislation to require a new vote of Marana residents to take over the system.

## **Opinions**

### **Thinks Marana doesn't understand consequences**

*Posted: Wednesday, Apr 13th, 2011*

Dear Editor,

The Town of Marana is looking for a solution to a problem that doesn't exist.

Marana doesn't seem to be aware of the consequences of its attempt to take over the Marana Wastewater Reclamation Facility from Pima County.

I refer to County Administrator Charles Huckelberry's memo to the Board of Supervisors dated March 16, which points out that the average Marana user will see his/her monthly sewage fee increase almost \$47. That's about \$600 a year.

However, let's say the town, after expensive litigation, is ultimately successful. Personally, I will be pleased that the costs will be taken over by them because the ratepayers of Pima County will see a decrease in their monthly sewage fees. Marana residents' costs will go up; Pima County residents' costs will go down.

I suggest that Marana proceed at its own peril.

Jerry Estruth

*For the complete article see the 04-13-2011 issue.*

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