



Washington dc update

December 18, 2009

Latest NY Times Articles on Dangers of Drinking Water

The NYT continues its crusade of misinformation on drinking water quality and casting stones at the integrity of the water industry. Our update of December 9th reviewed one article; this update deals with the latest.

We have attached the latest in the New York Times series concerning the dangers posed to public health by insufficient regulation of water and wastewater utilities. This article focuses on drinking water and what is perceived as a failure by the Safe Drinking Water Act to protect the public health.

We are assuming that many of you are preparing to take a few days off for the holidays. If you are, then we recommend that you get settled in a nice comfortable chair and take the time to read this article carefully. As of yesterday, more than 250 comments had been posted to the NY Times site in response to this article. Many were critical of the approach and are well worth reading. WESTCAS members are both highly experienced and also thoughtful professionals and whether you like it or not, you are in the eye of this particular hurricane.

Whether you agree with the conclusions suggested by this article or not, there can be no doubt that these sorts of presentations will deeply impact the thinking of both key Members of Congress and also those at EPA. So simply ignoring what is said in the article is not an option.

The bottom line is simple here. If the NY Times can create fear and doubt among people every time they use their tap water, then these same people will be much more amenable to the costs and complexities associated with increased regulation. This isn't necessarily a bad thing if the process is careful and considered. Both of us, as "golden oldies" remember going out in our backyards in October of 1957 and watching Sputnik streak across the sky. For many, this created a sensation that mingled both wonder and terror that the Soviet Union was far advanced with regard to space technology and that our very existence was at stake.

But Sputnik was also the catalyst for a vast expansion of science and mathematics education that helped to lay the groundwork for two generations of American prosperity. Let us hope, and also demand, that the sort of article attached to this report results in the Federal government establishing sound policies that actually make our drinking water even safer than it currently is.

Here are a few highlights from the article:



- Since 2004, more than 62,000,000 Americans have been exposed to drinking water that did not meet at least one commonly used government health guideline intended to protect people from cancer or serious disease.
- The NY Times examined concentrations of 335 chemicals that government agencies have determined are associated with serious health risks. This analysis counted only the times that water agencies reported these contaminants in their water supply at least 10 times since 2004.
- This represents a 1 in 10,000 risk of causing disease that is roughly equivalent to the cancer risk posed by receiving 100 X-rays.
- The original Safe Drinking Water Act regulated only 20 different substances in drinking water. This number has grown to only 91 and has not increased since 2000.
- The Times article alleges that the current drinking water standard for arsenic results in one in 600 residents developing bladder cancer over their lifetimes which is the equivalent of every person receiving 1,664 X-Rays.

Scared yet? Or perhaps just angry at the presentation of these sorts of statistics?

Either way, WESTCAS and its members must be ready to engage in this issue in the New Year.



This may remind you of the latest Omnibus Appropriations bill... but have a great Christmas and Holiday Season!

Fred and Tom.

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