



Mike Mecca

About the Ban

It has been almost three years since California passed Assembly Bill 1366, allowing municipalities to ban the sale and use of water softeners. *Water Quality Products* Assistant Editor Nicole Bowling spoke with Mike Mecca, past president of the Pacific Water Quality Assn. (PWQA), about how the bans are affecting the local water quality industry.

Nicole Bowling: What is the status of the water softener ban legislation in California?

Mike Mecca: [The] Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) passed a [softener ban] ordinance that is a kind of framework—it pretty much tells its member agencies to do it a certain way or there might be consequences. IEUA is the sanitation and sewer provider for cities in San Bernardino County, and while some of them do not like the law, when IEUA suggests something, the cities have to really take it seriously.

One of the city managers we spoke to said that those of us in the water quality industry have to work with IEUA because it does not want to have to take this to its city council and impose the ban on its citizens. While we tried to do that at WQA [Water Quality Assn.] and PWQA, this ban was something that had been coming for 10 years from IEUA. The organization had done its homework.

Bowling: What are the potential negative consequences of banning water softeners?

Mecca: The ban is only in effect for new installations. Although, if you pass a ban, you are prohibiting the most effective and newest technology the industry offers today or could offer in the near future. For the short term, in 10 to 20 years, cities could actually make the water quality problem worse by implementing a ban because they are preventing people from buying or installing one of the new ultra-efficient pieces of equipment. If you have a softener, what we affectionately call “old salt hogs,” you have to keep it going, and they get more and more inefficient over time.

Bowling: Is there an alternative solution to a water softener ban?

Mecca: An alternative solution would be a softener ordinance. You could embrace some of the new technologies specifically in the ordinance, whether it is twin-tank units, which are inherently more efficient, or sensor-based equipment. You could mandate in your ordinance higher efficiencies overall.

There are some cities now that are starting to draft their softener ordinances, and we are working with a few of them. They are testing some of the ultra-high-efficiency equipment themselves to see how it works. They are being extremely cooperative and have no intention of implementing the ban.

Bowling: How has this ban affected the local water quality industry?

Mecca: I have the perfect example to answer this question. I was in a business meeting with my company, which is involved in one of the EDI [electrodionization] salt-free systems, and we were discussing what opportunities were available for true salt-free conditioning systems in [the city of] Santa Clarita. Santa Clarita was perfect for the true salt-free systems because traditional softeners are banned and illegal to even own.

We were trying to figure out who was still left in that town that would be able to understand the salt-free technology, sell the equipment and service it long term. And for the life of us, there are no independents left. So the ordinance did exactly what it set out to do—it destroyed what little water treatment industry there was and all independents were driven out of business.

Bowling: What do you see for the future of this legislation?

Mecca: Santa Clarita was a wake-up call for the sanitation district because it [tried to do] one thing and another happened. As an industry, we were saying, “This is not what is going to happen,” but they said, “We are going to do this, and we are going to do that.” The senator of that district even wrote a letter to the editor and called the legislation a “bait and switch” because the city came to him with a whole set of proposals and numbers—“this is what we can do if we completely ban softeners”— [that later] did not even come close.

A couple of cities we are working with are taking a logical approach. They understand that there is better equipment coming out, so it will take care of itself as time goes on. I do not see any draconian measures on the horizon for bans or all-out removals. What they have done did not work or caused more problems than what they foresaw. The industry has done a great job—we just have to drag it down the channels [to] the dealers and the customers, to only use the highest-efficiency equipment out there. Then the problem would take care of itself. *wqp*

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For more information on this subject write in 1008 on the reader service card.

NSF Offers New Product Quality Registration for Italian Companies

NSF Intl. launched the new Origine Qualità Controllata Product Registration Program to verify the quality and origin of products produced in Italy via documentation review and facility audits. Fratelli Pettinaroli was the first company to be registered through the program. All registered companies will appear in NSF’s online listings.



Eco-Labeling Program to be Available Later This Year

The Water Quality Assn.’s eco-labeling program, which will allow companies to certify their products as sustainable, is being reviewed by outside stakeholders and is on track to be available later this year. It incorporates a management standard that will be used to evaluate the corporate practices of manufacturers and component suppliers to assess their eligibility for participation and promote sustainable practices. The draft management standard is available for review and comment by interested parties.



U.S. Water Partnership Launched to Address Global Water Challenges

U.S. public and private sectors are dedicating more than half a billion dollars to address key water challenges around the world through the newly formed U.S. Water Partnership. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) General Counsel Scott Fulton and former EPA Administrator William K. Reilly keyed the global launch of the partnership, one of six signature initiatives announced by the U.S. government at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

NSPF Launches First Recreational Water Illnesses Online Course & Book

The National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF) launched the Recreational Water Illnesses online training course and handbook, designed to help professionals understand and prevent waterborne illnesses.



EPA Completes Water Well Testing in Pennsylvania

The U.S. EPA completed private drinking water well sampling in Dimock, Pa. Data from residents, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and Cabot Oil and Gas Exploration had indicated potential elevated contaminant levels in wells. After resident requests, EPA sampled contaminant levels in the area. It determined that there are not levels of contaminants present requiring additional action. *wqp*

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