



Customer Pipeline

Emerald Coast Utilities Authority

ECUA Executive Director Responds...Again.

Dear Valued ECUA Customer,

As the ECUA's Executive Director and a Pensacola area resident, let me be direct in responding to a flyer that appeared in some of the area's mailboxes during the Christmas week. The flyer was a marketing piece aimed at selling water filtration systems, and specifically dealt with the quality of drinking water in Pensacola, as supplied by the ECUA. The flyer included the re-print of an article that was published last year (Feb. 3, 2011) on various websites affiliated with MSNBC.com. The article's author, Douglas McIntyre, actually summarized and issued information originally released nationally in a report issued by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) in December, 2009.



The claims in the EWG report and the subsequent MSNBC.com article placed ECUA's water as the "lowest rated water" in the entire US. As you can imagine, the ECUA's Board, our water quality professionals and I, vehemently contested this ranking, **noting that ECUA drinking water is totally safe and meets all established federal and state standards.** In fact, through the entire five-year period covered in the EWG report (2004-2008) and the intervening years up to the present day, the ECUA has complied with all safe drinking water standards with no regulatory violations at all. On the contrary, a number of the utilities that were ranked higher than ECUA, including fifth-ranked in the nation's **best** water in the EWG report, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, actually had violations of the safe drinking water standards.

Immediately following the release of the EWG report, the ECUA asked for a scientific review of the report by the Center for Environmental Diagnostics & Bioremediation (CEDB) at the University of West Florida. That CEDB's report, which can be viewed on the ECUA website at www.ecua.fl.gov, stated that, "the EWG report does not present a valid scientific assessment of water toxicity, nor are its comparisons of utility systems statistically valid." The CEDB review goes on to say that the EWG report, "ignores the risk assessment procedures used to establish safe regulatory standards and their comparative rankings have little or no scientific validity." Essentially, the CEDB review showed that the claims in the EWG report (and the resulting MSNBC article) were sensationalized misrepresentations of data, designed and formulated for shock value. The UWF scientists actually described the report as 'bogus'. Another fact pointed out in the CEDB report is that the EWG report is not attributable to any specific author(s) and there is no mention of the expertise or credentials on the part of the authors or even the EWG organization as a whole. For your convenience, we've included information regarding the EWG report and its conclusions related to ECUA water on the reverse side of this newsletter.

The ECUA staff includes state-licensed water system operators and water quality laboratory technicians. These dedicated professionals are on duty all day, every day, working to provide safe and reliable drinking water to our entire customer base, including their own families. The ECUA operates its own state-certified water quality laboratory, which conducts hundreds of water analyses weekly. The analytical results for all of these tests are kept on file and submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as required. We are pleased to report that the ECUA water is not only totally safe, but also some of the best in the United States. In a water tasting competition among the utilities in the western Florida Panhandle, ECUA's water has been judged "best tasting" water three separate years in the past six annual competitions.

Our water utility professionals adhere to high standards and take pride in their provision of a consistently safe, high quality drinking water to all of our customers. It's worth noting that on the EWG website, beside the original report, is a link that leads the reader to the possible purchase of a water filter/filtration system, and that EWG actually receives a kickback, or a percentage of each purchase made on Amazon.com, when it is made through the EWG website.

Rest assured, when you drink ECUA water, you are getting a safe product that complies with all federal and state water quality standards.

Sincerely,

Stephen E. Sorrell, PE, MPA
Executive Director, ECUA

ECUA Water Quality and the EWG Report of December 2009

The intent of the December 2009 EWG report was to assess and rank water quality throughout the country, and to shock and alarm readers in order to pressure the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to adopt stricter water quality standards. According to the EWG report, ECUA ranked last of 100 utilities chosen for the report. There are over 48,000 water utilities in the United States, yet only 100 were included in the ranking. Several cities, such as Atlanta, were not included in the ranking because they had either failed to submit sampling data to their states' regulatory agencies or had not conducted the sufficient sampling. More importantly, ECUA water is of outstanding quality, meeting every standard demanded by the federal and state regulatory agencies during the time period covered by the EWG report.

The report's ranking was largely based on the total number of samples that tested positive for a variety of chemicals, disregarding the amount detected (concentration), the frequency of detection, and the location(s) of detection (was it detected at only one well site or at several?). The ranking was not based on the percentage of positive detections as a ratio of the total number of samples. For example, a utility could have had 10 samples reviewed, with 5 detections (50%), but would have been considered to have better water quality than the utility that had 10 detections out of 500 samples (2%) because of the lower number of positive detections of chemicals (5 vs. 10).

The average utility in the study had 420 samples reviewed, with 8 detections (1.9%), while ECUA had 74,897 samples reviewed with 45 detections (0.06%). Averaging the number of exceedances and pollutants per test (ratio), ECUA ranks considerably better than the average. In fact, ECUA would rank higher than the number one-ranked Arlington Water Utility in Fort Worth, Texas. With 15 chemicals detected out of 1,832 samples, its chemical-to-sample ratio is .82%! Remember, during the time period covered by the EWG report, ECUA water met every standard demanded by the federal and state regulatory agencies. ECUA's appearance at the top of EWG's ranking for the worst drinking water is simply the result of misguided statistical analysis.



Why does ECUA conduct so many more tests annually than the other utilities? It's simple. Most utilities in the United States and Canada derive their municipal drinking water from a single source, such as a lake, river, bay or reservoir. Typically, these utilities have one or two water treatment facilities serving their communities. Some utilities draw potable water from a ground water source. ECUA's water is drawn from the Sand-and-Gravel Aquifer through 32 wells situated throughout our service area. Each well is considered a water treatment plant and the sampling /testing protocol applies to each site. Approximately 1,250 samples are drawn each month throughout our system, multiplied by 60 (months), we arrive at about 75,000 samples. ECUA conducts a comprehensive monitoring program by collecting and analyzing water samples from each well site and various other locations throughout our service area. This program is regulated by the state. Samples are tested for more than 100 bacteriological and chemical components.

ECUA produces and mails an annual Water Quality Report to all of our water customers in May/June each year. This publication includes the results of our water quality testing for the previous sample recording year, and is also available on at www.ecua.fl.gov. ECUA customers can inquire about water quality or report a water quality problem by calling ECUA Customer Service at 850-476-0480; ECUA Water Quality Manager at 850-969-6689.



Mark Your Calendars!

ECUA offices will be closed on **Monday, February 20**, in observance of the Presidents' Day holiday.

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Sanitation Pick-up Schedule for the Presidents' Day Holiday

There are **no changes** to the collection schedules for all Residential and Commercial customers.

All garbage, yard trash, recycling and commercial dumpster collections will be made on their regularly scheduled days.

Have a Safe and Happy Holiday!