

- **Board of Directors**
Communications, Outreach and Legislation Committee

March 11, 2003 Board Meeting

9-5

Subject

Adopt policy principles on consumers' right to know and understand the quality of their drinking water

Description

Three out of four consumers in Southern California report that they drink at least some bottled and/or vended water, yet little information is readily available about the quality of these products. In contrast, drinking water utilities are required to provide their customers with consumer confidence reports on the quality of tap water. Without similar requirements for bottled and vended water, it is difficult for consumers to make informed decisions about the water they drink.

Most information already available is not easy to understand. The use of technical language, obscure acronyms and confusing terminology are just some of the reasons that water quality information may not be clear. Terms such as maximum contaminant level goal, public health goal, action level, provisional guideline, maximum contaminant level and reference dose can be confusing to the public, and the plain English meaning does not necessarily convey the actual meaning. Confusing language can create false impressions about whether water is safe to drink.

Language barriers also explain why water quality information may not be accessible to everyone. Metropolitan's research in 1997 found that approximately 35 percent of the population in the six counties served by Metropolitan speak a language other than English, or in combination with English, at home. Unless there are efforts to meet the needs of non-English speakers, significant segments of the population may get overlooked.

Additionally, not all consumers want identical information about water quality. Differences in health status, educational level, and environmental awareness can influence the breadth and depth of information desired and the way in which it is received.

Policy principles are needed on this topic due to recently introduced legislation. AB 83 (Corbett - Alameda) and SB 50 (Sher - Stanford) both address the issue of providing better information to consumers about the quality of bottled and vended water. Additional legislation is anticipated in this area. Policy principles will provide direction to staff and enable better input in the legislative process and any future regulations addressing this issue.

Staff recommends adoption of the following new legislative policy principles so that consumers in Metropolitan's service area can be better informed about the water they drink.

1. Support consumer information on all sources of water that consumers drink, including bottled water, vended water, and other tap water alternatives.
2. Support cost-effective efforts to communicate this information about water quality in languages and forms consumers can understand.
3. Support the development of simplified and standardized terminology to support consumers' right to know and understand the quality of their drinking water.

These policy principles are also consistent with Metropolitan's planned outreach to the medical community to provide understandable and useful water quality information to health care providers and the patients they serve. [Attachment 1](#) describes the timeline for the medical outreach program.

Policy

None applicable

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

CEQA determination for Options #1 and #2:

The proposed action is not defined as a project under CEQA because the proposed action involves continuing administrative activities such as general policy and procedure making (Section 15378(b)(2) of the State CEQA Guidelines). In addition, where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed action in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the proposed action is not subject to CEQA (Section 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines).

The CEQA determination is: Determine that the proposed action is not subject to the provisions of CEQA pursuant to Sections 15378(b)(2) and 15061(b)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines.

CEQA determination for Option #3:

None required

Board Options/Fiscal Impacts

Option #1

Adopt the CEQA determination and the policy principles as proposed.

Fiscal Impact: None

Option #2

Adopt the CEQA determination and the policy principles with specific revisions.

Fiscal Impact: None

Option #3

No action

Fiscal Impact: None

Staff Recommendation

Option #1



Adán Ortega, Jr.
Vice President External Affairs

2/21/2003
Date



Brian G. Thomas
for Ronald R. Gastelum
Chief Executive Officer

2/21/2003
Date

Attachment 1 – Timeline for Medical Outreach Program