

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WSG 35A

Date Signed: January 30, 1985

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Press Release Policy

TO: Assistant Administrators
Associate Administrators
Regional Administrators
Regional Counsels
Regional Public Affairs Directors
Staff Office Directors

I would like to clarify EPA's policy regarding the Agency's option to issue press releases on Agency regulatory decisions and enforcement agreements, and on the content of those announcements.

The content of press releases is an EPA internal matter at all times. It is against EPA policy to negotiate the agency's option to issue press releases, or the substance of press releases, with parties outside of EPA, particularly those parties involved in settlements, consent decrees or the regulatory process.

A. James Barnes
Acting Deputy Administrator
(Signed by Jim Barnes)

Date Signed: February 29, 1985

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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U.S. EPA GRANTED PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION TO FORCE CLEAN UP
OF CONTAMINATED DRINKING WATER IN PLACER COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

(San Francisco)--The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Friday was granted a preliminary injunction by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in a civil suit against Midway Heights County Water District filed under the authority of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

The preliminary injunction was granted to protect the public water supply of residents of a growing community near Weimar, in Placer County, who receive drinking water from a completely untreated system. This water supply presents an endangerment to the health of consumers.

Until the District supplies bottled water, residents are advised to boil all water for five minutes before using it for cooking, drinking, washing dishes, brushing teeth, and making ice. The preliminary injunction requires the District to immediately provide bottled water until chlorination is put in place, to install a chlorinator by March 7, 1988, to provide a second chlorinator by May 1988, and to provide treatment to reduce the risk of virus in the water supply. The District must sample the water and notify the public and the users of the contaminated water until the issue is finally resolved in court.

"This severely contaminated open ditch system operated by the Midway Heights County Water District subjects customers and visitors to a serious health threat," said John Wise, Acting Regional Administrator, EPA Region 9. "A water supply that is not fit for human consumption has no place in our society and violates the clear mandate of Congress."

Wise continued, "EPA will pursue these open ditch systems throughout the Central Valley and the remainder of California. This action by the court is a first step. We intend to continue to work closely with the California Department of Health Services to remove these threats to the public health."

The District supplies untreated water to more than 630 people from an open ditch that receives runoff from heavily traveled Interstate 80, cattle pastures, septic tank fields, and other areas of human activity.

Tests conducted by the California Department of Health Services show that maximum allowable bacteria levels for drinking water have been greatly exceeded. Human or animal excrement has been detected in the water sold by the District. Intestinal parasites and other diseases-causing organisms may also be present. Water containing these organisms causes serious illnesses such as gastroenteritis, giardiasis, and hepatitis.

EPA filed suit against the District on July 31, 1987, after an emergency order it issued in December 1986, failed to bring the District into compliance with the law. This suit cites the District for violations of bacteriological and turbidity standards; for failure to monitor water quality; for failure to notify the State, the public, and customers of the poor quality water; for failure to take additional samples when water failed to meet the standards; and for violating EPA's emergency order. The District has maintained that it supplies water for irrigation use only, although its customers use it for drinking water.

The California Department of Health Services had already issued an administrative order against the District, but the District had refused to comply. The State has also sued the District to require that the District apply for a permit to operate a public water supply system. That case is presently pending before the California Superior Court in Auburn.