

## Councilman senses 'threat' from water company

[Ari Cohn](#), Tribune, May 30, 2008

Scottsdale City Councilman Bob Littlefield said he senses a threat in Arizona American Water Co.'s claim that it will "respond accordingly" if the city earmarks \$10 million in next year's budget in case officials decide to condemn the private utility.

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The proposed \$10 million placeholder would give city officials the legal authority to allocate the money and take action during the next fiscal year if the need arises. It would also "send a message" to Arizona American Water Co. that the city is serious about confronting the private utility over two recent scares related to contaminated drinking water, city officials said.

[Click to view a map of Arizona American Water Company's service area](#)



But Arizona American President Paul Townsley, in a May 20 letter to the City Council, said that if officials approve the budget item Tuesday, the company will interpret the move as the city's first step in taking the private water system through eminent domain. The company "will be compelled to respond accordingly," Townsley wrote.

Littlefield said he's not sure what response Townsley is referring to, but suspects it might involve the company wading into the upcoming City Council election.

"I was like, 'Wait, is that a threat? You can't threaten us. Where do you get off threatening us when you're the people who screwed up?'" Littlefield said.

Todd Walker, Arizona American spokesman, said Townsley's statement did not refer to any specific action.

"We would be prepared to protect our private property rights," he said.

The city's confrontation with the utility stems from two recent trichloroethylene, or TCE, contamination scares at Arizona American's Miller Road Treatment Facility in Scottsdale. About 12,000 customers in parts of Scottsdale and Paradise Valley may have been exposed on Jan. 16 to TCE in drinking water at quadruple the maximum allowable limit because of a mechanical breakdown.

The company had a previous TCE problem in October, but at the time, officials said the tainted water was blended with TCE-free water, lowering concentrations to within federal limits.

Arizona American has since announced that the well linked to the TCE problems has been permanently disconnected. But city officials are considering options ranging from working more closely with the utility to condemning the system to taking it over.

"We have a responsibility to lean on these guys, and the whole idea of the \$10 million is to show we're serious," Littlefield said.