

Progress report expected on water quality

by **Diana Balazs** - Apr. 21, 2008 06:33 AM
The Arizona Republic

The man who oversees the Arizona American Water Co. has asked to speak to the Paradise Valley Town Council to update the council on the progress to reopen the company's water treatment facility and other matters.

Paul Townsley, president of the Western region of American Water, sent an e-mail to the town asking for the opportunity, said Town Manager Jim Bacon.

Townsley could appear as early as Thursday's council meeting, or in early May, Bacon said.

Arizona American, which is one of three water providers in Paradise Valley, is a subsidiary of American Water.

Todd Walker, Arizona American spokesman, said Townsley has said he would update the council before the private water company re-opens its plant that treats well water for a potentially cancer-causing industrial solvent called trichloroethylene, or TCE.

The treatment plant at Miller Road and McDonald Drive in Scottsdale has been shut down for the past three months.

In January, the plant's TCE treatment process failed along with an alarm notification system. Water contaminated with TCE flowed to the taps of nearly 5,000 Paradise Valley and Scottsdale customers. The malfunction resulted in a three-day ban on using tap water for drinking or preparing food.

In March, the Scottsdale City Council voted to have the city study whether to absorb the company's operations into its municipal system. Options include condemnation or purchase.

Arizona American recently conducted phone surveys of both Paradise Valley and Scottsdale customers. Walker said the poll primarily focused on customers' views of their water service. But the survey reportedly included questions about Scottsdale's possible takeover of the company, the city's mayoral candidates and Scottsdale City Councilman Ron McCullagh, an Arizona American customer who is highly critical of the water company.

"We research a wide range of issues, including views on eminent domain due to the recent action by the Scottsdale City Council," Walker said.

Walker said the survey was paid for by the stockholders of American Water.

"As we've reiterated many times, the company is not for sale," Walker added.

Arizona American's Miller Road plant treats groundwater containing TCE that was dumped by Motorola and other businesses decades ago into the North Indian Bend Wash Aquifer.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated the aquifer a federal Superfund cleanup site. Motorola and the other participating companies are responsible for paying for the cleanup.

Walker said Arizona American plans to submit the necessary information to reopen the treatment plant by April 28. He said the plant could be restarted by early May.

When that occurs, Arizona American will pump and treat water from two of its wells that contain lesser levels of TCE, he said. It no longer will pump or treat highly contaminated water from a well known as PCX-1. The well is owned by the Salt River Project, but was treated by Arizona American.

Arizona American, in turn, used the treated water from that well as part of its domestic supply.

Motorola will assume pumping and treatment of PCX-1, Walker said. The treated water would be channeled into the Arizona Canal. Federal, state and county environmental authorities would have to approve the plan.

The EPA has said the PCX-1 well must be pumped to prevent the plume of TCE in the North Indian Bend Wash Aquifer from spreading to other parts of the Valley.