

# Water firm's officer vows better service

by **Diana Balazs** - Apr. 28, 2008 04:13 PM  
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PARADISE VALLEY - The [Arizona](#) American Water Co. has spent more than \$40,000 in reimbursement costs so far in connection with a three-day water ban in January.

The Jan. 15-17 ban was imposed after water containing higher than permitted levels of a suspected cancer-causing chemical known as trichloroethylene, or TCE, was accidentally released.

Contaminated water flowed through customers' faucets after Arizona American's TCE treatment plant near Miller Road and McDonald Drive malfunctioned.

The water ban affected nearly 5,000 residential and commercial customers in Paradise Valley and [Scottsdale](#). Many of them scrambled to buy ice, bottled water, soda and other drinks to get them through the crisis.

"In the case of the commercial customers (such as resorts and restaurants), we are issuing checks. In the case of residential customers, we are issuing refunds on their bills," said Paul Townsley, Arizona American president.

The company is not issuing a general refund or credit to all its customers, Townsley said, only to those who requested reimbursement.

Townsley briefed the Paradise Valley Town Council April 24 about the reimbursement effort and other issues. He last appeared before the council Jan. 25.

"I received a lot of feedback and I took that feedback to heart," Townsley said.

That feedback included doing a better job communicating with customers, both during an emergency and on an ongoing basis, he said.

Steps have been taken to improve customer outreach, including asking customers to contact its call center to update their phone numbers, Townsley said.

The Miller Road treatment plant, idle for more than three months, was set to resume operation this week. Arizona American and Motorola Inc. will jointly operate it.

Motorola has been identified as the primary source of the TCE. The industrial solvent was dumped into the groundwater decades ago.

"In essence, you need to think of the Miller Road treatment plant at this point as two treatment plants under the same roof, completely disconnected from each other," Townsley said.

A contaminated well called PCX-1 was at the center of January's incident. It has been disconnected from Arizona American's system. Arizona American no longer will treat the well and use the water as part of its supply. Motorola will take over treatment. The water from PCX-1 will be treated and discharged into the Arizona Canal. Arizona American plans to treat one of its wells contaminated with TCE, already below federal standards, to eliminate all traces of the contaminant, Townsley said.