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July 2, 2014

TO: The Honorable Robert Godshall
53rd Legislative District, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Chairman, House Consumer Affairs Committee

FROM: Jason Bobst
Township Manager, West Norriton Township

Testimony: PA American Water/Norristown Water Treatment Plant - Water Treatment Issues from May

Good morning Chairman Godshall and members of the House Consumer Affairs Committee. On behalf of the Commissioners of West Norristown Township, our 15,000 residents and residents of the surrounding communities impacted by this issue thank you for allowing me to discuss the recent water quality issues at PA American's Norristown Water Treatment Plant.

Economic Impact

As you are aware, the Norristown Water Treatment Plant serves over 31,000 customers in the Norristown area, specifically in East Norriton, West Norriton, Lower Providence, Whitpain, Worcester and Whitemarsh Townships, but that reach is much greater as many of the local businesses impacted by this issue employ people from the greater Philadelphia region. Many of our local businesses, especially locally owned restaurants and delis, had no choice but to close their doors due to the lack of quality drinking water for food preparation. Many of these businesses are locally owned and operated by residents who live within our townships. Needless to say, the impact of this issue hit them much harder than the larger, chain owned restaurants that have the resources available to bring in potable water that meets the standards and requirements set by the Montgomery County Health Department. Due to the large service area impacted by the loss of water and the extended period of time, finding water tanks became a stressful endeavor for our business owners.

Over the course of this event, the Township received numerous calls from residents voicing their frustration with the length of boil water advisory and the impact it had on their daily lives. Several residents expressed frustration over not receiving the automated calls regarding the boil water advisory and conflicting information they had received.

Heavy Rainfall

It has been noted that the problem surfaced on Tuesday May 20th when water quality inspectors at the Norristown plant determined that heavy rainfall totals throughout the month had churned up sediment in the source water of the Schuylkill River near the Norristown Water Treatment Plant. This caused dramatically lowered capacity, and an effective water shortage. Prior to May 20th, the Norristown area received roughly 7 inches of rain for the month of May.

Beginning on April 30th and ending May 1st, West Norriton Township experienced heavy rainfall and major flooding in the Port Indian section of the Township. During this period, roughly 4.8 inches of rain had fallen in the area and we experienced the 4th highest cresting of the Schuylkill River on record at 20.8 feet. Also during this time, the Army Corp of Engineers authorized a release of water from the Blue Marsh Dam, located upstream from West Norriton. It is our belief that the release of water from the dam upstream increased the water levels in the Schuylkill River. Initial forecasts had the Schuylkill River cresting at 14 feet, which would be at Minor Flood

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stage for the township. The heavy rainfall, coupled with the damn release, caused this forecast to increase to 21 feet thus exceeding the Major Flooding stage.

West Norriton Township recently completed an Inflow and Infiltration Study for our sanitary sewer system. As part of this study, the township installed flow meters into our sanitary sewer system to monitor flow. Two storms of significance were analyzed as part of this report: June 7, 2013 and July 23, 2013. The storm of June 7, 2013 lasted 24 hours and West Norriton received between 3-4 inches of rainfall. This amount of rainfall would represent a 2-year storm based on the latest NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Point Precipitation Frequency Estimates. The storm of July 23, 2013 was a very short, high intensive event lasting 2 hours. West Norriton received 1.6 inches of rain and this rainfall amount would represent another 2-year storm based on the NOAA Point Precipitation Frequency Estimates.

During the events of Superstorm Sandy, West Norriton and the surrounding areas were hit with heavy rains and winds that impacted the Schuylkill River. When the snow melted from this past winter's harsh weather and the Schuylkill River iced over from the cold temperatures, significant water runoff made its way to the Schuylkill River.

During these periods, we received no notification that the Norristown Water Treatment Plant was experiencing water quality issues.

In my previous position, I served as the Manager of the Borough of Pottstown. In this capacity I also served as the Authority Manager for the Pottstown Authority. This authority operates a water plant that produces an average of 4.5 million gallons of water per day for roughly 12,000 customers. The plant also uses the Schuylkill River as the sole source of raw water for processing. During my time as Authority Manager, I cannot recall a storm event or heavy rainfall that impacted the long-term operation of the water plant. While most plants have operational procedures for tropical storms or heavy rain events, the rainfalls that impacted the Norristown plant occurred prior to the boil water advisory. The most significant rainfall prior to issuance of the boil water advisory occurred on May 17th, three days prior. In my discussions with area managers, the Norristown Water Treatment plant was the only plant that uses the Schuylkill River as the sole source of raw water to experience an issue with water quality due to heavy rainfall.

Conclusion

A question we have been asked over and over again is how did this happen and what can be done to prevent an issue like this again. I applaud PA American's response when the issue was discovered. The daily conference calls and the support we received from their staff were remarkable. While no one can find fault with their response, the question remains as to why this happened.

On behalf of the residents of West Norriton Township, I would like to thank this Committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.