

Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #15, May/June 2003

***Our Water, Our Future** is the newsletter that keeps you, our valuable members, on the leading edge of watershed protection activities. Through the generosity of the Noyes Foundation, both this newsletter and our website, www.newyorkwater.org, have been made possible.*

STRANGE SCIENCE - DEP'S MOSHOLU PLAN REVEALS WOEFUL INADEQUACIES

In a concise statement made May 23 directly to the N. Y. State Assembly Committee on Cities, chaired by Assemblyman Scott Stringer, CWCWC reveals the dangerous inadequacies and invalid science of the DEP Mosholu plan.

*Honorable Members of the NYS Assembly
Committee on Cities:*

Thank you for holding this hearing. The subject - the siting of a chemical treatment/filtration plant for Croton water in Van Cortlandt Park [Bronx, NY] - is of deep concern and vital importance to the residents of NYC, to the residents of Westchester and Putnam Counties who reside in NYC's Croton Watershed, and indeed to those 9 million people - over half the population of New York State - who drink NYC water.

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition comprises over 50 groups throughout NYC and its watershed. A cross-section shows an unusual diversity ranging from the Queens Civic Congress to housing groups such as the Metropolitan Council on Housing, and religious and environmental groups, (*cont., page. 2*)

SAY WHAT ? DEP'S 2002 ANNUAL REPORT ON CROTON REVEALS EXCELLENT WATER *So why Does it Claim Filtration is Still Necessary ?*

CWCWC's non-filtration position is neatly supported by the 2002 NYCDEP Drinking Water Supply report, and confirms DEP's nonsense on the subject. Here are some of the highlights:

#1 - East of Hudson (EOH) is lagging significantly behind West of Hudson (WOH) in these three major areas:

Land Acquisition: Mentions acquisitions around the Kensico and Rondout reservoirs, and the amount of land solicited and/or acquired in the Cat/Del.

There's no mention anywhere of the Croton—clearly, there's no significant land acquisition going on in the Croton watershed.

Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades-WOH: 83% of the permitted flow was upgraded by August, 2002. *EOH:* nearly 50% of facilities completed preliminary design by the end of 2002 and are expected to begin construction in 2003.

If the past is any indication of the future, how can anyone honestly believe that the (*cont., page. 2*)

DEP'S PLAN WOEFULLY INADEQUATE (cont.)

such as the Episcopal Diocese of New York and Sierra Club. Our goal is to protect and improve the high quality of the waters of the Croton Watershed by protecting the water at its source. We are opposed to the end-of-pipe so-called "solution" of a chemical treatment/filtration plant.

We are adamantly opposed to building this plant in Van Cortlandt Park, at the Mosholu site. Of all the many sites that have been proposed and then abandoned, this one is clearly the worst.

The many drawbacks that this site would entail have scarcely been touched upon or even mentioned in what the DEP would have us believe is a full and complete Environmental Impact Statement. The short, inadequate review that was published in 1998 when Mosholu was first proposed and then abandoned through court action hardly touches upon the many problems associated with the site.

The proposed EIS attempts to minimize the impacts on the densely populated surrounding communities that rely on the park for some relief from noise and traffic.

We are told that, this time, the plant will be completely below ground. This will require the blasting of a hole, at least 60 feet deep. However:

-the EIS omits to say that the resulting dust from blasting and fumes from trucks will only worsen the asthma in a community where the rates are documented to be among the highest in the City. Back in 1998, Scott Schroeder, M.D., a pediatric pulmonologist at Montefiore Medical Center, is quoted in the *Norwood News* (December 17 - 30, 1998): "Children are going to be hospitalized or use more medications - and that's if everything goes perfectly." The article goes on to say: "Schroeder cited the diesel fumes from the trucks involved in construction of the plant, organic mold dug up from the ground, and emission of ozone as being the chief enemies of asthma sufferers."

-The EIS omits to say that, based on past experience, digging and blasting in this area displaces thousands of rats, which then proceed to overrun the neighborhood.

-The EIS omits to mention that a nearby children's playground, built by the community, will be unusable during the 7 years of construction and, probably, thereafter as well. This is simply the barest of outlines. Others speakers will have to expound on the facts that the plant does not have a backup electrical power system so that, in case of failure, as much as 30% of NYC water could be cut off. Or that the filtered water will be recirculated to assist in the cooling of the plant (hopefully without getting contaminated) before reaching the consumers' taps. Or that over 200 mature, shade-giving trees will have to be destroyed. Or that the plant appears to be extremely vulnerable to terrorist action. The EIS glosses over these vital concerns or does not address them at all.

If these concerns were honestly addressed, nobody could consider for one moment siting this (cont., page 3)

SAY WHAT ? (cont.)

DEP is going to start truly protecting the Croton once filtration is installed?

#2 - Water quality in the Croton often outstrips that of the Cat/Del, as well as many filtered systems nationwide:

There's far less of the pathogens crypto or giardia in the Croton as compared to the Cat/Del, as a quote from page 9 of the report reveals: "In 2002, a total of 144 samples of Kensico Reservoir effluent and 66 samples of New Croton Reservoir effluent were collected and analyzed for Giardia cysts and Cryptosporidium oocysts using Method 1623 HV. Of the 144 Kensico Reservoir samples, 95 were positive for Giardia, and 38 were positive for Cryptosporidium. Of the 66 New Croton Reservoir samples, 28 were positive for Giardia and 13 were positive for Cryptosporidium."

#3 - DEP confirms that color and odor of the water are aesthetic, not health, issues, and that deteriorating infrastructure is a culprit:

Another statement confirming the aesthetic, not health nature, of color and odor is found on page 8 : "...the quality of new York City's drinking water remains high and meets all health-related State and federal drinking water standards.. Color, an aesthetic condition in the Croton and Groundwater Systems *occasionally* (emphasis added) may exceed the standard." This statement agrees with the results of a CWCWC FOIL, which showed that the shutdowns of the New Croton Aqueduct were overwhelmingly due to repair work in the aqueduct and only occasionally due to water quality.

Additionally, it's interesting to note that under the report's Q & A section (page 15), in answer to the question, "Sometimes my water is a rusty brown color. What causes this?" the DEP says, "Brown water is commonly associated with plumbing corrosion problems inside buildings and from rusting hot water heaters... In addition, brown water can result from street construction or water main work being done in the area. Any disturbance to the main, including *the opening of a fire hydrant* (emphasis added), can cause pipe sediment to shift, resulting in brown water..." This is corroborated by yet another CWCWC FOIL, which asked for all work done within a 0.5-mile radius of Morris Park, in the Bronx. Morris Park was the backdrop to a television news story aired November, 2002, in which a Bronx resident, holding a flask filled with murky water, was interviewed by a WCBS reporter; the outcome of the interview was that the murkiness would be eliminated with the arrival of the Croton filtration plant, an impression that DEP made no effort to correct. Our FOIL showed that from mid-September, 2002, to the end of October, 2002, not a day went by without one or more hydrants having to be flushed. Filtration is not going to help if most of the problem in the Croton is due to the distribution system, which, although it has served New York City exceedingly well, is now aged and known to be in a state of serious, if not dangerous, disintegration. (cont., page 3)

DEP'S PLAN WOEFULLY INADEQUATE (cont.)

chemical industrial facility in the park. And, if it were allowed in Van Cortlandt Park, what would prevent other parks throughout New York State from being trashed for similar purposes?

We understand that \$243 million is being offered to gain support for location of this unpopular plant at Mosholu. It is reported that those monies are to be part of the savings that this City realizes by building at Mosholu. We have reviewed the enabling laws of the Water Authority and the Water Board, and we find nothing that would empower them to either raise or spend money from water bonds for renovating parks. These funds should be used to protect the watershed instead of trying to obtain support.

The often-cited problems with Croton water - color and odor -- are aesthetic, not health issues, and can be treated at a fraction of the \$1.5 billion cost of the filtration plant by using alternative technologies and sound watershed protection.

Our Coalition is suggesting a pilot study using chlorine dioxide as the primary disinfectant together with chlorine. Chlorine dioxide is used throughout Europe, Canada and many U.S. cities for the very purpose of eliminating color and odor. It would cost a fraction of the chemical treatment/filtration plant, and could be installed in a far shorter time, thereby protecting public health sooner.

Under state law, reservoirs that supply unfiltered water have a higher classification and more protection than those that supply filtered water (NYS CRR Title 6, Chapter X Parts 701.5 and 701.6). Once Croton water is filtered, and even with the mere prospect of filtration, more development in the watershed resulting in more pollution and degradation of the reservoirs that supply our drinking water will occur. Given the increased toxic mix of chemicals and pesticides that will get washed off our lawns and roads into the reservoirs, there is no guarantee that any chemical treatment/filtration plant will be equipped to neutralize this poisonous soup.

Ratepayers will see their water and sewer rates increase significantly while, at the same time, water quality will decrease. According to DEP Commissioner Ward, at a January 31 [2003] hearing at the School in the Bronx: "There is a cost associated with building our water system. There is a cost that we will all end up paying. And, without a doubt, today, the water system and its rates have a regressive effect on low income households." (Quote drawn from videotaping by David Ferguson, The HDFC Council; CWCWC board member.)

The result? Ratepayers and especially those with low incomes will be subsidizing development in the watershed and getting inferior water in return.

Why should the City spend money it does not have on a plant it does not need? The plant should not be built anywhere. And, in particular, it should not be built at the Mosholu site in Van Cortlandt Park. CWC

SAY WHAT ? (cont.)

#4 – Disinfection byproduct levels are dropping yearly:

DEP is citing the level of haloacetic acids in Croton water as being a main driving force towards the need to filter. In fact, the level of HAAs decreased considerably in the Croton from the previous year. In 2001, the concentration was close to 60 micrograms/liter, which is the maximum level allowed under the regulations. This year, the concentration was 49 micrograms/liter, a considerable decrease. With serious watershed protection, DEP could decrease the level of haloacetic acids and other disinfectant by-products even more, and there would be *really* no need to filter. CWC

◆ NEWS OF NOTE ◆

Nys department of
environmental conservation
REGOGNIZES CWCWC 'S STREAM
PROGRAM

The DEC gave CWCWC very special recognition last week when it presented us with an award for our stewardship of the waterways of N.Y. State. The award was given for the stream monitoring program that CWCWC implemented last fall, which is used to measure the health of tributaries feeding the Croton watershed reservoirs. CWCWC received a beautiful poster and multiple certificates from the Albany office.

*And speaking of stream
monitoring ...*

CWCWC completed its spring testing of some of the Croton watershed area waters, making a trek into the streambeds of two Putnam County streams to pull replicates. The program has also been asked to test the waterway that will be affected by the proposed megalithic Eagle River development in the town of Somers. This testing took place June 14, with final tallying under way.
