

Currents

food&waterwatch

News from Food & Water Watch's Water for All Campaign

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This Is What Democracy Looks Like



Residents protest higher water rates in Lexington, Kentucky. Photo by Victoria Kaplan/FWW.

The people of Lexington, Kentucky, will finally have a chance to vote on who should control their water service: distant shareholders or a local public company. On May 23, Kentucky American Water, a subsidiary of German conglomerate RWE, dropped its lawsuit that sought to put the brakes on local democracy. Kentucky American had previously tried to argue that referendums were illegal in the state of Kentucky.

After hearing the news, grassroots group Bluegrass FLOW (For Local Ownership of Water), issued a statement that began: "RWE has apparently decided it is cheaper to buy television than to pay lawyers." If last year's near-election was any indication, RWE is in for a run for its money. Before the Kentucky Supreme Court cancelled the referendum vote in 2005, 99 absentee ballots had already trickled in. The results? 77 for local ownership of water, 22 against.

TAKE ACTION!

Support the people of Lexington's campaign for local ownership of water by taking action at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/rewire-american-water.

Mayors Support Public Funding Of Water Systems...

Water was on the agenda at the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, which was held June 2-6 in Las Vegas, Nev. The nation's mayors passed a resolution during the conference that recognized aging water infrastructure as a primary concern among the nation's mayors and demanded that Congress increase funds allocated to state improvements of these systems. At the same time, Food & Water Watch released its new report on water privatization, featuring case studies of communities battling RWE, Suez, and Veolia, after experiencing the negative impact of water privatization. It is available at www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/reports/faulty-pipes. "The real answer to our water woes lies in federal funding, not corporate takeovers that have led to higher rates, poor customer service, and dismal accountability," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch.

On July 6-9, FWW staffer Jessica Roach will be heading to the **Midwest Social Forum** in Milwaukee, to discuss local and global struggles in the fight against corporate control of water on a panel called "Grassroots Struggle against Water Privatization." Check out the program: www.mwsocialforum.org. To reach Jessica, email her at jroach@fwwatch.org.

...While Corporate Executives Continue Water Takeover Plot

Despite a long series of failed mergers and government contracts, water industry executives told a recent gathering of investors they could profit handsomely by sinking their money into water companies. And part of the industry's strategy to boost profits is privatizing public systems operated by local communities. "How do we take some of the market share away from the government?" pondered Anton Garnier, vice chair of Los Angeles-based Southwest Water Co. Garnier was one of several industry executives pitching their companies to investors at "Profiting in the Water Industry: Tapping a Reservoir of Wealth," held at New York City's Harvard Club on June 8. "Here's where the rubber meets the road," Garnier said, "What is the return to the shareholder?"

Meanwhile, executives spoke little about issues of most concern to Americans, such as water quality, access and affordability.

Is The Lead Emergency Over In The Nation's Capital?

In January 2004, *The Washington Post* revealed that the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority (WASA) withheld information on the elevated lead levels in D.C.'s water for more than a year. A subsequent test by WASA conducted in March 2004 showed lead levels exceeding the maximum 15 parts per billion recommended in one of every three homes. Many homes exceeded 300 parts per billion. Children and expecting mothers are especially vulnerable – lead contamination can cause learning disabilities, even below the 15 parts per billion action limit.

In early June, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency reduced its federal oversight of WASA after new tests showed that lead contamination—on average—is now below federal action limits in Washington, D.C. WASA has changed its water treatment to orthophosphate, a chemical that creates a coating on the leaching lead pipes. But this treatment should only be seen as a temporary solution. While the new tests show improvements, they are barely within the federal action limit of 15 parts per billion and residents should still remain vigilant on the issue. Meanwhile, pipe replacement has not gone according to schedule because the cost remains



An action outside the mayor's office in D.C. Photo by Maj Fill/FWW.

high to individual households, despite efforts to provide financial assistance. At \$1300, many choose to keep old pipes. Food & Water Watch has called for increased citizen participation in WASA's management to address consumer-related issues.



New Jersey Town Wants Out Of Corporate Contract

The Township of Dover, New Jersey, has filed a lawsuit against Suez' United Water Toms River because of the corporation's inability to provide a reliable and safe supply of drinking water. The township has also petitioned the Board of Public Utilities to revoke United Water's franchise. "It's imperative that we initiate immediate legal action to wrest control of this water company away from them because they put the public's safety at risk," Mayor Paul C. Brush said. "It's time to change course and have someone else running the water company." The state of New Jersey recently fined two United managers for shutting off a well in order to alter the results of radiation tests. On June 15, they were indicted by a state grand jury on charges that they manipulated tests to hide high levels of radium in the drinking water of a community where environmental officials have linked contaminated water to childhood cancer. The series of corporate misconduct came to a head on Memorial Day, when water pressure slowed to a drip for several hours.

Desalination Update

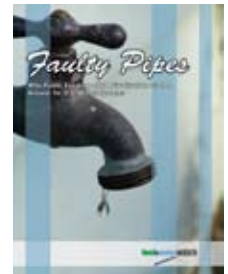
On June 13, the Carlsbad City Council certified an inadequate Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the proposed desal plant, invoking a legal response and moving the process to the Coastal Commission. The following day, state water-quality regulators postponed a decision on a pollution discharge permit for the plant to allow its staff to make final changes to the plant's proposed permit and provide the public 30 days for review. On the federal level, a bill

that would provide \$120 million in subsidies from taxpayer dollars to dirty desalination plants was released by the House Energy and Commerce committee without any debate or vote. This means the bill could come up for vote before the full House in the upcoming weeks. Stay tuned for more information and how you can get involved to stop this wasteful and destructive spending bill.

"Our Communities, Our Water: Connecting the Local and the Global," Sept. 22-24, 2006: Join community activists, water workers, students and faith groups from across New England, New York and Eastern Canada, at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. For more information, visit www.massglobalaction.org.

Read This!

FWW's Water for All Campaign released a new report on the U.S. community struggles over water privatization. Find it here: www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/reports/faulty-pipes.



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