



Environmental Health Division Statewide Forum to Ensure Safe Drinking Water

OVERVIEW: Placer County Environmental Health created a drinking water workshop to bring statewide industry and regulatory professionals together in a collaborative and unique forum.

CHALLENGE: An estimated 360,000 Californians are served by water systems with unsafe drinking water. Placer County is one of thirty California counties implementing a California Safe Drinking Water Act program. While the state's Safe Drinking Water act is designed to ensure that water systems are standardized and meet code requirements, most counties are challenged to adequately fund activities to ensure local water is safe for consumption, leaving little to no resources available to train water professionals. This is particularly problematic since relationships between water system regulators and operators can be disconnected. As new drinking water becomes harder to find, regulations become more complex and technology becomes more advanced, county environmental health staff and water system industry personnel need ongoing technical training and collaboration to stay up-to-date and find solutions.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION: To meet these challenges, Placer County created a forum that provides needed training and information in a collaborative, solution-driven approach that benefits the regulators, the water system operators and communities that must meet new requirements. The primary goal was that attendees would not only learn new concepts but see them in action and discuss them with others in the drinking water field, from both sides of the equation.

The forum provided four days of technical training and open discussion hosted by a regulated system operator, Squaw Valley LLC that included a tour and review of their water system. Lessons learned from a previous contamination incident that had been resolved at Squaw Valley were discussed, by both Squaw operators and Placer Environmental Health regulators, in a hands-on learning experience. The opportunity to see the components of a water system was not only a unique educational experience but a demonstration of the necessary partnerships between local government and the community we serve. The forum also had the added benefit of exposing attendees to the wonderful offerings of Placer County, including the Lake Tahoe area. The county partnered with the American Water Works Association (AWWA) to design training content, on topics ranging from overviews of new regulation to water supply disinfection and cross connection control. Training modules included presentations, videos, practice exercises and group discussions. Continuing education units were awarded to those attending, helping them renew their prospective certifications. The environment promoted networking amongst the regulators and operators.

ORIGINALITY: The statewide event was the first of its kind, bringing regulators and operators together with a shared goal on ensuring safe drinking water for the public. As drinking water regulations quickly evolve, it is necessary for both regulators and industry professionals to continue their education in the field, and to develop a close, collaborative working relationship. Placer County is gratified and proud to have established an annual workshop which will bring these players together. Based on the foundation Placer County established, the next forum event planned for this fall will be presented by the California Conference for Directors of Environmental Health and the State Water Resources Control Board. Technology training and hands-on demonstrations will be provided by the California Rural Water Association.

COST EFFECTIVENESS: The cost of the first drinking water workshop was \$21,500. Funding was provided through a grant from the California Department of Public Health that was primarily focused on developing a database for reporting requirements of the regulatory programs. Placer County had already previously developed that program, and was the first in the state to be in full compliance with the reporting requirements, so the county elected to use part of the funding to improve public health by partnering with water professionals statewide in a collaborative workshop forum.

RESULTS: Over 100 drinking water professionals and stakeholders traveled from all over California to Squaw Valley Resort for the workshop. Approximately 75 percent of attendees were regulators from county environmental health departments. The other 25 percent were drinking water operators, many which were from small water systems across the state.

Survey results from the Drinking Water Workshop were extremely positive. Participants found the topics pertinent and the instructors engaging. Reviewers were impressed with the organization and the collaboration of the event. The water system tour at Squaw Valley was very popular, as it demonstrated the latest technology with an in-the-field, hands-on learning opportunity. Sample feedback:

"Partnerships with the regulators and operators is essential. All programs should model Placer's approach."

"We really needed this training. All the topics were pertinent. We hardly ever get water training."

Placer County Environmental Health is pleased to have established this much-needed forum for the future safety of small drinking water systems, and look forward to similar forums going forward based on its success.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS: USB stick with [video](#) and other supporting materials attached.