

Déjà Vu All Over Again



It was about this time last year when the water quality industry began its fight against California's misguided Assembly Bill (AB) 2270, which would have banned the use of water softeners in residences.

Here we are a year later, and in the words of Yogi Berra, it's like déjà vu all over again as the Golden State's government is back at it with the newly proposed AB 1366.

Similar to AB 2270, AB 1366 would make it easy for municipalities to ban water softeners. The measure, which recently passed the assembly and is making its way through the legislature, authorizes local water boards to seize water softeners from private residences to supposedly solve the problem of water salinity in rivers and streams.

Has this assembly not learned anything from last year's passing—and imminent failure—of Santa Clarita's Measure S? To bring you up to speed: Last November, Santa Clarita, Calif., voters passed Measure S approving the removal of home water-softener systems in use in many Santa Clarita Valley homes. The Sanitation District blamed water softeners for the high salt levels in the Santa Clarita River, and claimed that the removal of water softeners would save the sanitation district from building a new, expensive treatment system.

Recent data is now showing that the softener ban is not reducing chloride levels as expected, and local treatment plants may need costly upgrades. It was thought that the removal of water softeners would satisfy the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the chloride standard would be set at a level reachable by just removing water softeners, according to Santa Clarita's local newspaper, the *Signal*.

The Regional Water Quality Board, however, did not budge on its standards after the measure passed, forcing Santa Clarita's sanitation district to propose a treatment plan and rate hike—in addition to the softener ban.

The Santa Clarita Valley Sanitation District was to vote May 26th on a rate increase that, if approved, would increase sewer assessment rates for the average homeowner from \$14.92 per month to \$47 by 2015, based on a 250-gal-per-day average. The sewer rate vote is on hold for now, as sanitation district board members requested more information before making a decision.

So what does this water softener mess out west mean for dealers across the country? First and foremost, just because a legislative issue is happening in California does not mean it won't happen near you. A softener ban can be proposed anywhere, and as a water dealer, it is your responsibility to be ready to fight if you happen to find yourself in this situation. You must keep informed and up to date on all industry-related issues so that you can thereby inform your customers and local legislatures of the importance of water softeners.

The Battelle Memorial Institute, for example, is currently conducting extensive research on the benefits of water softeners. Recent results show that untreated hard water can rapidly lead to clogged showerheads in as soon as a year and half of regular use. The final report is expected in September, and you should make yourself aware of its findings.

It is essential to the well being of our industry that you stay abreast developments such as this, and that you relay this information to your customers and community. You should also take some time to write a letter to California assembly members opposing AB 1366, because as we saw last year, every small effort makes a big difference.

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coming up next month

The 2009/2010 *Water Quality Products Buyer's Guide* issue will feature a Product & Services Guide as well as Product and Supplier Directory sections. Visit our website at www.wqpmag.com to view our online Buyer's Guide and daily industry news updates.

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