



Summersville Meets The Challenge

By Fred Stottlemyer and Larry Rader

Thursday, May 11, 1995 started like most other days for the Summersville water plant operators. The recent spring rains had Muddlety Creek flowing at a nose perfect level and the operators went about their normal morning routine as they headed into an average spring weekend.

Under the direction of water Superintendent, Steve Acree, the Operators were fine tuning a new high lift pump designed to meet the peak demand flows of the rapidly growing community which straddles Rt. 19, the northern pathway to the south. The 750 gpm plant is a gem among water plants being one of the best maintained and cleanest plants in the state.



Chief Operator Steve Acree surveys the booms at his intake.

As the morning progressed, the Summersville operators has no idea that a crisis was about to shake their normal world of quiet solitude. Around noon a DEP inspector announced that he had discovered oil leaking into Muddlety Creek at an abandoned coal tippie located several miles upstream from the plant. Without warning the city was suddenly threatened with losing its water supply and service to 1600 customers.

An inspection of the site and Muddlety Creek showed hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel in the stream rapidly moving toward the plant's intake. Mayor Steven LaRose quickly declared an emergency situation and ordered water conservation steps which included closing schools, ending non-essential uses, and urging customer to do all they could to conserve water.

With an approximate 48 hour supply in its tanks, the water plant was shut down. Assisted by an outpouring of help from volunteer fire departments and the state, a fleet of trucks went to work hauling both finished and raw water from an alternate source to the plant. Volunteers from Summersville, Craigsville, Nettie-Leivasy, Wilderness PSD, Richwood, and Mt. Nebo Fire Department worked 21 hours straight hauling water to the plant.



Summersville Water Treatment Plant during the emergency water hauling operation.

The finished water loaded from Wilderness PSD was discharged through emergency piping into a clear well where it was then pumped into the system. Four dump trucks were set up and tied together with a PVC header pipe and raw water, hauled by tankers from the Department of Highways, Craigsville, Nettie-Leivasy and the Summersville Fire Department, was pumped into the plant for treatment.



Just 2 of the several contamination problems upstream from the Summersville Water Plant.

The news media descended on the plant and a circus atmosphere prevailed for the next 24 hours. While town officials waited for lab reports to determine if one of the contaminants contained glycol antifreeze, a type of chemical reportedly stored at the pollution site, preparations were made to restart operations as soon as the diesel oil slick moved beyond the plant's intake.

On Friday morning, West Virginia Rural Water Association's Program Specialist, Larry Rader, made arrangements to have 75 cubic feet of granular activated carbon (stored at South Putnam PSD) transported by truck to Summersville. With the carbon on its way to Summersville, Larry and the local officials began plans for installing a carbon cap on the

filter and increasing the feed rate for powered activated carbon. By mid-afternoon the granular activated carbon had arrived at the Summersville plant. By late afternoon preparations were underway to start treating water from Muddlety Creek.



A crew unloading granular activated carbon from South Putnam PSD.

Early that evening raw water sample results were received showing no presence of glycol in the raw water supply. The plant was put back on line. Although the system was operational, tank levels had dropped significantly during the 30 hour crisis. Only 4 1/2 feet of water remained in one of the tanks when plant operations resumed. However, operating through the night the system began gaining water. By morning the depleted tank had risen to 12 feet. Things were back to normal.

Exhausted from their 36 hour ordeal, Superintendent Acree and the plant operators assembled Saturday morning. Together they savored an air of relief knowing they had made it through a major crisis and within 24 to 26 hours their water tanks would be full and normal service restored to their customers. But, the phones kept ringing. The news media needed status reports and anxious customers wondered if there was sufficient water to perform necessary tasks that had been delayed for days.

At approximately 10:00 a.m. feelings of relief were shattered by a system employee's report of the presence of large oil pools at the spill site apparently missed in the previous days clean-up. Dark skies and an impending rainstorm evoked fears of more contamination to Muddlety Creek. A visit to the site indeed revealed that hundreds of gallons of oil floating on ponds which drain straight into Muddlety Creek via a culvert.

Since the clean-up crew (controlled by DEP) had been released, an emergency clean-up had to be quickly organized by the city. DEP Director, Eli McCoy, was contacted at his home and told of the impending new crisis. He authorized the city to proceed with the second clean-up before the rain hit.

Prior to starting clean-up efforts, the State Police inspected the site for clues to determine if an additional act of vandalism could have caused the mess. A contractor then extracted the oil from the ponds with a skimmer as city employees wiped up smaller pools of oil with absorption pads.

A major clean-up effort of this site continues. Meanwhile Summersville officials are working with state agencies to develop a long term plant to protect their water supply. Under the leadership of Mayor LaRose, the town is planning short term improvements while moving forward with plans to construct a regional water plant designed to meet the demands of growth well into the 21st century. Summersville Lake will provide the water source for the new plant and the Muddlety Plant will eventually shutdown.