

## MWQA Addresses Proposed Northfield Centralized Water Treatment Plant

### Study Presented to Northfield Council Suggests Removal of Home Water Softeners

One of the topics addressed at the recent MWQA Town Hall Meeting was the proposed \$33 million water treatment plant being considered by the City of Northfield. The study presented at a city open house suggested residents may be able to disconnect home softeners after the treatment plant is up and running, as their water will be “soft.” MWQA is committed to providing accurate information to Northfield citizens about issues such as disconnecting softeners, the effects of using untreated water on high efficiency appliances, and options (such as softener optimization) that can be done in the home.

MWQA President Scott Schiesser recently spoke with Jeff Johnson of KYMN Radio in Northfield, discussing the proposed plant and its effects on home water treatment. This is a great example of getting the word out to the public when projects such as “hardness reduction” plants come up in your area. MWQA is available to help you prepare press releases, conduct interviews, or write communications to the public if your community is faced with a proposal that urges customers to disconnect softeners. Contact us if your community is considering such a project, and please keep tabs on your local government, watching for proposals that may include changes to your community’s drinking water system.

The Northfield Public Works Department is advocating for the construction of a new Drinking Water Treatment Plant to mitigate the effects of higher levels of Manganese in city water, and to offer softer water to the community. Earlier this month, the City Council voted to approve those plans. Construction of the facility would come at the cost of about \$33 million and could increase monthly water bills by more than 200%.

Certain groups have suggested that a new treatment plant is not necessary and there are other solutions for the issues. Scott Schiesser, Director of Sales & Marketing for

water treatment company Culligan, said there are “easy” ways to eliminate the higher manganese levels with in-home Point of Entry systems.

Furthermore, according to Schiesser, while the reverse osmosis treatment would be highly effective, it would not create true “soft water,” and public belief that it could, would be detrimental. “Soft water is one grain of hardness or less. And the plant that is being proposed here in Northfield is not that. It seems like it’s somewhere between five and seven grains. And if I’m under the impression from the communications coming out – if I think that I’m getting soft water, I might be tempted to remove my water treatment equipment.”

Another issue Schiesser raised is the buildup of elements in a decades-old water delivery system like Northfield’s. When the water chemistry is altered through the reverse osmosis process, it is likely that the residual elements in the pipes would be released back into the treated water, thereby nullifying the process and making it moot.

Still another issue is the release of chlorides into the water supply, which are not filtered out by water treatment plants and go on to harm Minnesota’s rivers and lakes. The reverse osmosis process will likely lessen the need for the use of in-home water softener systems, which are a major source of chloride release into the water supply. Schiesser suggested that both the problem of chlorides and manganese can be better alleviated by other, consumer based, solutions. The manganese can be managed with a water softener. And while water softeners produce chlorides, he said that that problem can be mitigated by optimization of home water-softener settings. City staff is currently searching for alternate means of funding the new treatment plant. No timetable for its construction has been set.

Schiesser's interview with KYMN Radio can be heard in its entirety by following this link:

<https://kymnradio.net/2022/04/27/scott-schiesser-discusses-northfields-water-quality/>