

# Laguna well-drilling project Worries Sebastopol Council

by Frank Robertson  
Sonoma West Staff Writer

**SEBASTOPOL** — City Councilman Bill Roventini last week verbally thrashed a Sonoma County Water Agency well-drilling project near the Laguna and accused the agency of violating state environmental regulations.

"I'd stop it if I could," Roventini told Water Agency and Santa Rosa city officials who attended last week's Council meeting to explain the well-replacement project. Roventini blasted the Water Agency for what he suspects is "a secret collusion" with Santa Rosa to store treated wastewater in the aquifer beneath the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

"Our city was slighted" by a lack of advance notification of the project, said Roventini. "We're entitled to know what you're up to," Roventini told Water Agency officials and Santa Rosa Assistant City Manager Ed Brauner. "I think it has to be more of an inclusive process" when any activity involves a shared water supply.

Roventini's tirade was joined by West County water activist Ann Maurice, a frequent critic of Santa Rosa city wastewater practices, who is calling for a grand jury investigation and has contacted a lawyer regarding a possible lawsuit to halt the project.

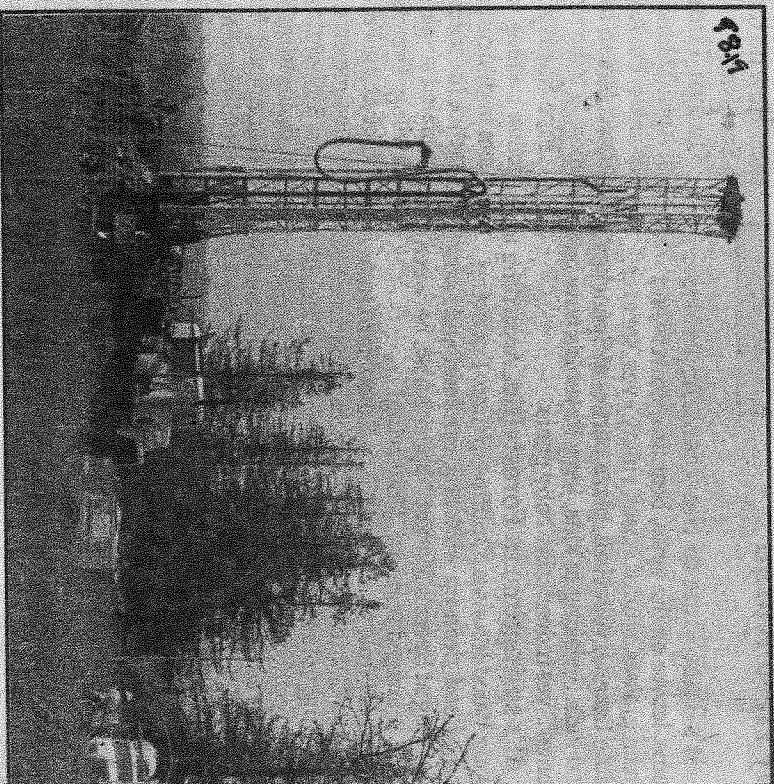
On paper the Water Agency plan appears to be an unremarkable maintenance effort to replace two existing water agency emergency backup wells. The wells help ensure a water supply in the event the Water Agency's Russian River wells are out of service.

But Roventini and Maurice say it smacks of an experiment several years ago when the city of Santa Rosa attempted a controversial process called "aquifer injection."

Also known as "ASR," for "aquifer storage and reclamation," the process involved the mingling of highly-treated wastewater with potable water in the aquifer near Sebastopol and Rohnert Park. The experimental test plan drew strong opposition from Maurice and Roventini who said it threatened to pollute the community's water supply. Eventually public outcry resulted in the city putting the project on hold.

This time the Water Agency is planning to temporarily dispose of turbid well water by connecting two wells to nearby pipes carrying treated effluent from Santa Rosa's Laguna Subregional Treatment Plant on Llano Road to a city holding pond.

The combination of well-water



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**DRILLING FOR WATER** — A drill rig was parked along Highway 12 last week as part of a water agency project that aroused concern on the part of the Sebastopol City Council.

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and effluent will be stored in a city pond and used for irrigation.

The Water Agency says the pipe connection is a safe, practical way to dispose of turbid water that often doesn't meet drinking water quality standards when a new well is brought into production.

When the well water turbidity improves, the temporary pipe to the effluent line will be disconnected, Water Agency Deputy Chief Engineer Mark Lawler told the Council last week.

"Once the water produced by the new emergency wells meets drinking water quality standards and the testing has been completed, the connection between the well and the effluent transmission line will be physically disconnected, and the well will be connected to the Agency's Russian River Cotati Inter tie aqueduct," said Lawler, in a written explanation to Sebastopol City Manager Paul Berlant this month regarding the well-drilling.

Temporarily piping the turbid well water to a city storage pond was "the most prudent thing for us to do," Lawler told the Council.

Water Agency staff had determined the project was so inconsequential as to be exempt from CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, said Lawler.

There was little public notice of the well replacement project because, under the law, "We didn't feel we needed to," said Lawler.

But Roventini and Maurice

claim the project violates CEQA because of potential environmental impacts that should have been addressed in a public hearing and an environmental impact report.

Under CEQA, "It's an illegal project," said Maurice.

"They have no business doing this without an environmental impact report," said Maurice, who urged the Council last week to seek a court injunction to halt the project.

Instead the Council instructed Sebastopol City Manager Paul Berlant to draft a list of Council questions and concerns which will be sent to the Water Agency for a response.

Among the Council's concerns is a recent Water Agency draft Environmental Impact Report regarding the proposed expansion of the supply and transition system for the Water Agency, which supplies water to an estimated 500,000 people in Sonoma and Marin counties.

The two-year-old EIR says the backup wells would eventually be used for ASR, that is, to store effluent in the aquifer.

But Water Agency officials this week said categorically that no ASR use is now planned for the two replacement wells.

"They will not be used for ASR," said Erica Hendricks, a Water Agency Senior Environmental Specialist who attended last week's City Council meeting.

The controversial wells, "are simple extraction wells," nothing more, said Hendricks.