

**F**or years the salt debate has raged on, sparking litigation, legislation, obfuscation and some recrimination. What it should have created is innovation that could be sustained into the future. Yes, there have been some cool technological advances in the water treatment industry, but not enough to blunt the ever-rising tide of adverse action and sentiment leveled against dealers and manufacturers alike.

Placement of the US, especially the southwest, in the water scarcity category is pushing more demands for change in equipment and technology. Global warming, whether hard science favors its existence or not, continues to incite environmentalists to fight our industry. What is the answer to all who claim we are not environmentally friendly in product manufacturing or the resultant waste-stream generation of water treatment applications that California is hell-bent to claim as the next great disaster?

Change must happen to preserve the rights of businesses to continue their pursuits. We may not be able to see how much has changed in the last 50 years, nor quantify the level of commitment that has already been fostered by precarious legislation. We're moving into the future at a breakneck pace without really analyzing how far technology has advanced the cause of consumer and businessman alike.

Let's take a look at the next wave of change that is on the horizon, the best scientific data to bolster this industry in years: Battelle's recent study on water softening. The reputation of the Battelle Institute lends credibility to water softener manufacturers and dealers unlike anything that has been produced in recent memory. As we learned at Aquatech, soft and fluffy is relevant but energy efficiency is of even more importance to consumers. The study is a new tool that, if used properly, could herald a much-needed change for the industry, one that produces positive results.

In their panel presentation, Vince Kent, Eric Rosenthal, Sam Karge and Bob Hague made one point clear: there must be a consistency of the message that energy efficiency and water softeners go hand in hand. Everyone, from manufacturers to consumers, is trying to find ways to save money, and energy efficiency is being placed at the top of the list. As a marketing message, it resonates with a wider cross-section than ever before, especially in these very trying economic times.

The opportunity for the water treatment industry to return to positive ground lies with each and every dealer and manufacturer. Presenting facts to consumers and legislators isn't a one-time proposition. Those presentations must be widely used to impact the target audience and they must be credible. The Battelle study (and those that are currently in progress) may give water treatment the boost it needs to get back to the business of serving customers with what they want, without interference from legislative bodies or local ordinances. What used to be consumer choice is quickly transforming into a dedicated interest in saving money, energy and the planet. It's a win-win opportunity to change the mindset of industry opponents well into the future.



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