

**ORIGINAL**

Decision No. 73835

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

CANYON COUNTRY HOMEOWNERS  
ASSOCIATION, a corporation,  
Complainant,  
vs.  
SOLEMINT WATER COMPANY,  
Defendant.

Case No. 8683  
(Filed September 5, 1967)

Kaye B. Swan, for complainant.  
Karl K. Roos, for defendant.  
Jerry J. Levander, for the  
Commission staff.

O P I N I O N

Complainant Canyon Country Homeowners Association seeks an order directing defendant Solemint Water Company (1) to install adequate facilities, (2) to place such facilities in operation, (3) to anticipate additional demands upon the water system before additional tracts are developed, and (4) to stop delivery of construction water until an adequate supply is assured the residential customers.

Public hearing was held before Examiner Catey at Newhall on December 14, 1967, and the matter was submitted on said date. Testimony was presented by two of defendant's customers and by a Commission staff engineer.

Complainant and Defendant

Complainant is an association of homeowners in the North Oaks Development, near the Newhall - Saugus area of Los Angeles County.

Defendant is a public utility water corporation serving the North Oaks Development and other areas in the vicinity of Newhall and Saugus.

Service Interruptions

Exhibit No. 1 and the supporting testimony of a customer show that there were water service interruptions in the North Oaks area during May, June, and July of 1964 and during April, May, June, and July of 1965. The 1964 interruptions were covered by Case No. 7973, a complaint filed by North Oaks Homeowners Association against defendant. Decision No. 68283, dated November 30, 1964, states that a new booster pump installed in July of 1964, corrected the previous deficiency in the system. The 1965 interruptions were covered by Case No. 8229, a Commission investigation which included matters complained of by North Oaks Homeowners Association. The various decisions in Case No. 8229 required the prompt installation of certain overall system improvements and the preparation of a master plan for other long-range improvements. A Commission staff report, Exhibit No. 5 in the current proceeding, states that defendant has complied with all prior Commission orders. Exhibit No. 1 states that the service in 1966 was improved and lists only one short interruption during that year and, prior to August, only one interruption in 1967.

During August, 1967, residents in the North Oaks area were again faced with some five service interruptions, ranging from about two hours to twenty hours in duration. It is these more recent outages that are the subject of the current proceeding.

Cause of Interruptions

Complainants did not know exactly what caused the service interruptions. A Commission staff engineer who investigated the

situation diagnosed the causes and included a discussion thereof in Exhibit No. 5. Firsthand detailed information as to the sequence of events causing the interruptions could only have been presented by defendant. Defendant did not present any evidence on this subject.

The staff investigation indicates that the immediate cause of water service failure was the shearing of the shaft on the deep-well turbine pump at defendant's pumping plant designated S-8. This pumping unit is one of the sources of supply for defendant's 1550-foot zone. Without the S-8 plant, and with a coincident high water use due to an extended period of hot weather, the water in the 1550-foot Lower Sky Tank was depleted and service to some customers in the North Oaks area was intermittent.

The staff engineer concluded that, in the service failures in August, 1967, the use of construction water for residences and schools was not a significant factor. Defendant had taken steps to restrict the use of water for large-scale irrigation at schools, as well as restricting the use of water for construction purposes. The restrictions remained in effect until all pumping units were again in service.

#### Restoration of Service

In any prolonged series of interruptions, there is a question as to whether the utility made a reasonable effort to restore continuous service. Again, firsthand detailed information on this subject can only be supplied by defendant, which declined to present any testimony. The order which follows requires defendant to report to complainant and this Commission (1) the steps it took to maintain and restore service and (2) an explanation for the delay in repair of the pump.

Avoiding Repetition of Interruptions

It is apparent that, despite the improvements already made to defendant's system, additional facilities must be provided to insure against service interruptions caused by unavoidable malfunctions of mechanical equipment. Pursuant to past orders of the Commission, defendant has provided standby facilities in each boosting situation, but apparently needs additional standby sources of supply, intersystem water transfer facilities, storage facilities, or some combination of these.

The staff engineer concludes in Exhibit No. 5 that the best solution would be the provision of more storage capacity which can supply the North Oaks area, permitting longer shutdown of other plant for maintenance and repairs. The exhibit states that an additional reservoir of 700,000-gallon capacity in the 1550-foot zone had been planned for installation in 1966. That reservoir, designated as defendant's Gindling Reservoir, is part of the plant to be installed in connection with facilities to serve Tract No. 29577. Large mains were to have connected this reservoir with the basic 1550-foot zone and an additional connection would have been made to defendant's 1700-foot zone. The staff engineer's study indicates that the installation of the Gindling Reservoir and its associated mains would have prevented or lessened the extent and duration of the recent service interruptions.

Complainant's Exhibit No. 4, a copy of a letter from defendant's president to an assemblyman, attributes the delay in installation of the Gindling Reservoir to the fact that the county has not enforced the performance bond posted by the subdivider in 1964 to insure the installation of the tank and other facilities. The letter states that, over defendant's protests, the county has

successively extended the deadline for completion, that the latest deadline date was January 28, 1968, but that the construction had not yet been started.

The order which follows requires defendant to file monthly progress reports on the status of the proposed Gindling Reservoir until either its construction is completed or plans for its construction are abandoned.

Possible Contributing Cause

Defendant's 14-inch connecting main between two of these three present 1550-foot zone tanks is interrupted by about 600 feet of 8-inch main. Defendant apparently plans eventually to replace the 8-inch pipe with 14-inch. Complainant suggested that the undersized section of main may have contributed to the difficulty in keeping water in the Wilson Tank. Defendant offered no testimony on this subject.

The order which follows requires defendant to present an engineering study of the effect of the undersized main on the water flows available to the North Oaks area.

Alternative Solutions

Pursuant to orders of this Commission, defendant has prepared a master plan for system development. When, however, a major item of the master plan, such as the Gindling Reservoir, is delayed for a long period of time, defendant's obligations to its customers require that it substitute temporarily or permanently other facilities which will provide additional production or storage capacity in lieu of the originally planned facilities. The order which follows requires defendant to plan such alternate facilities if the Gindling Reservoir will not be completed soon.

Poor Communication

During the recent service interruptions, customers who called defendant's listed telephone number to determine the cause and probable duration of the interruptions were given conflicting and sometimes ridiculous answers. Customers who have been out of water for even basic sanitary and cooking purposes are understandably in no mood for either sarcasm or misplaced humor. Defendant's answering service and employees should be kept informed promptly and accurately regarding any prolonged or widespread service problems that may occur, and should provide such information courteously to customers who call.

The difficulty experienced by customers in obtaining information is not an isolated instance of poor communication by defendant. For example, (1) defendant was about three weeks late in filing its answer to the complaint in this proceeding, (2) defendant declined to present any evidence whatsoever at the hearing, and (3) the record in earlier proceedings shows that defendant's reports of compliance with Commission orders were often delayed, even though compliance had been effected.

The order which follows requires defendant to provide for better dissemination of information to its customers.

Findings and Conclusion

The Commission finds that:

1. Defendant presented no evidence regarding service interruptions which occurred in the North Oaks portion of its service area during August, 1967.
2. Defendant's proposed 700,000-gallon Gindling Reservoir would provide additional storage to the North Oaks area to help maintain service during shutdown of other facilities for maintenance and repairs.

3. A 600-foot section of 8-inch main in defendant's 14-inch connecting main may have restricted flows to the North Oaks area during the August, 1967, service interruptions.

4. If the Gindling Reservoir is not in operation by next summer, another shutdown of existing supply facilities for maintenance or repairs could cause a recurrence of the August, 1967, service interruptions.

5. During the August, 1967, service interruptions, customers did not receive courteous and accurate responses from defendant's representatives regarding the cause and probable duration of the interruptions.

The Commission concludes that defendant should be required to take the corrective measures set forth in the order which follows.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Within ten days after the effective date of this order, defendant Solemint Water Company shall file in this proceeding and furnish to complainant a comprehensive report stating (a) the steps taken by defendant during August, 1967, to restore continuous water service to customers in its North Oaks area, and (b) an explanation for the delay in repair of the well pump at plant S-8.

2. On or before the tenth day of each month after the effective date of this order, and continuing until completion or abandonment of defendant's 700,000-gallon Gindling Reservoir project, defendant shall file in this proceeding a progress report showing (a) work accomplished on the project during the preceding month and (b) the estimated completion date.

3. Within thirty days after the effective date of this order, defendant shall file in this proceeding an engineering study of the

probable effect of the 600-foot section of 8-inch main in defendant's 14-inch connecting main between two of the present three 1550-foot zone tanks insofar as the level of water in the 1550-foot Wilson Tank was affected during the August, 1967, service interruptions.

4. If the Gindling Reservoir is not in operation by May 1, 1968, defendant shall immediately file in this proceeding a statement of the size and type of alternative supply and/or storage facilities which defendant will install by June 30, 1968.

5. Within ten days after the effective date of this order, defendant shall institute a program which will provide accurate information regarding any prolonged or widespread service problems to all employees and representatives who are authorized to answer customers' requests for such information, and shall file in this proceeding a statement of the steps taken to effect compliance with this requirement.

The effective date of this order shall be twenty days after the date hereof.

Dated at San Francisco, California, this 12<sup>th</sup> day of MARCH, 1968.

[Signature]  
President

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]  
Commissioners