

CRYSTAL GEYSER: A HISTORY

The water and beverage bottling plant on Ski Village Drive in Mount Shasta, CA has been controversial since it was first built. Originally opened by Dannon Waters in 2001 to bottle "spring water" from its production wells and then later acquired by Cola-Cola, the plant generated much opposition from concerned local citizens because of the overwhelming lack of environmental oversight and protection from County and City officials. In December 2000, the County Board of Supervisors refused to consider an environmental review of the proposed Dannon plant despite the objections from citizens groups. Later that month several Mt. Shasta citizens filed a lawsuit challenging the County and Dannon over planned operations without any environmental review. Lawyers from Dannon subsequently threatened the citizens filing the lawsuit and fearing reprisals from the company they dropped the lawsuit.

In January 2001, Dannon began operations piping rinse water into the Mount Shasta waste treatment system. However, the Mt. Shasta treatment plant was unable to handle the increase flow and Dannon applied for a permit to dump waste water into an on-site leach field. In May 2001, Dannon was required by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB), as lead agency, to conduct an initial study of the environmental effects of its facility, as a condition for a permit for its on-site disposal of bottle rinse water. At the CRWQC public scoping meeting on Dannon's plant operations; approximately 100 people voiced their concerns about the effects on the local water supplies, plant noise, traffic, lighting, aesthetics, and future expansion. In spite of these concerns, in September 2001, Dannon received a permit to discharge thousands of gallons of plastic bottle rinse water into its leach field. The CRWQC adopted a list of environmental mitigation measures to be followed during Dannon's leach field construction and operation. In October 2001 the Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center filed a petition challenging the CRWQC issuing a negative mitigated declaration on Dannon's operations. All of the citizen's complaints and organizations objections were ignored. Ongoing complaints from neighbors about well problems, noise, nighttime lighting, and traffic were also ignored. The plant was later acquired by Cola-Cola and operations continued. In 2010 the plant was closed and Cola-Cola sold the equipment and shuttered the empty building.

In October 2013 the public found out that Coca-Cola had sold the building and surrounding properties with the production wells to Crystal Geyser (CG), a subsidiary of Otsuka Pharmaceutical. Crystal Geyser announced it was planning to open a tea and carbonated fruit juice bottling plant in the old building. It was also announced that Mt. Shasta City and CG were partners in a \$3 million Economic Development Administration grant with an additional \$3 million

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matching funds from CG (it was later revealed that the \$3 million matching funds were being contributed in lieu of a \$3 million hookup fee). The funds were to upgrade the sewer interceptor line to handle the extra sewage from the tea and fruit drink waste from the CG plant.

Local citizens immediately began a campaign to insist that this new plant and sewer hookup be subject to an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). As usual, the County Board of Supervisors claimed that no EIR was required and ignored all arguments to the contrary. However the Mt Shasta City Council, seeing a ground swell of support in the community for an EIR and listening to their own lawyer's advice, agreed to include the operation of the CG plant in the EIR for the sewer expansion project. In October 2014 a Notice of Preparation was issued by the city and over 125 public comments were filed with the City. Many people objected to the City's insistence that the EDA grant fund the EIR and insisted that CG pay for the EIR. In January 2015 the EDA revoked the grant for the interceptor line because of the controversy around the environmental effects of the CG plant and "Funding the EIR was NOT PART of the approved scope of work." However the EDA allowed the \$3 million grant to be applied to improvements to the Mt. Shasta waste water treatment plant (WWTP). With the withdrawal of funds from the interceptor line Mt. Shasta City officials claimed there was no longer a case to pursue an EIR on the Crystal Geyser plant. Crystal Geyser has now announced it will begin production of bottled water only, temporarily forgoing it's plans to produce fruit drinks and bottled tea. It appears that by doing so, CG hopes it can again evade an EIR that could be triggered by requesting to connect to the Mt. Shasta city WWTP or building an on-site sewer treatment facility.

However CG has announced plans to expand its operations to include tea and fruit drinks, increase its electrical power feed, build a huge solar array for even more supplemental power and begin PET plastic bottle manufacturing. Any one of these issues should be adequate to invoke an environmental review, but County and City officials once again are neglecting to act. The historic drought now gripping the Western United States causing a major water emergency in California must also be considered. California Governor Brown, in announcing the water emergency, said "We're in a historic drought and that demands unprecedented action." A plant that can extract water with no limits or environmental review is now, more than ever, something we cannot afford.

W.A.T.E.R. (We Advocate Through Environmental Review)

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