

**Report and Recommendations of the Business
Resource Conservation Focus Group**



June 2002

**Prepared by
The Business Environmental Alliance**



The Business Environmental Alliance

Profitability Through Sound Environmental Practices

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BUSINESS RESOURCE CONSERVATION FOCUS GROUP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While most people seldom think about where water comes from when turning on the faucet, or where electricity comes from when plugging in an appliance, the reality is that these resources have to be provided by some source, and are at times in limited supply. This fact could not have been delivered any more clearly than it was during the recent statewide energy crisis. Californians were forced to realize that energy is a limited resource; while energy can be produced, the production capacity is not limitless.

Water, on the other hand, is currently limited not by production capacity but by delivery capacity. While adequate water supplies exist, and will likely continue to exist into the near future, the limitations of the water delivery system allow the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) to reliably provide a maximum of 84 million gallons per day (MGD) during the peak demand months. However, during these months water demand can be in excess of 90 MGD, causing the water pressure in aqueducts to drop and creating difficulty in delivering water to the farthest reaches of the supply system. This taxing of the system occurs even during years of normal rainfall, and can be even worse during times of extended dryness when demand rises, further complicating the problem.

The Business Resource Conservation Focus Group was convened by the Business Environmental Alliance to determine to what extent water and energy supply issues currently exist, what actions can be taken *now* to lessen the chances of a resource shortage, as well as minimize the potential impacts that such a shortage could have on Sonoma County businesses. The group included 16 representatives of local businesses and government from a broad spectrum of business views and backgrounds. The Focus Group held a series of meetings from January to May of 2002, hearing from experts in the fields of energy and water delivery. After collecting this information, two primary principles were evident: first, water and energy are in limited and sometimes short supply; second, continued economic vitality requires the business community to conserve these resources. With these principles in mind, Focus Group members developed a consensus on opportunities for the encouragement of conservation measures by Sonoma County businesses.

The Focus Group attempted to identify the major obstacles that resource conservation efforts currently face. They determined that the main obstacles existed in three categories: Education, Simplicity, and Commitment. The Focus Group sought to propose innovative ideas that could overcome some of these barriers. The Focus Group's general recommendations for each of these obstacles are featured at right.

The following pages detail more specific recommendations made by the Focus Group. It is hoped that work can begin on many of these recommendations within the next calendar year. The Focus Group believes that these recommendations will greatly assist Sonoma County businesses in preserving the current high quality of life in Sonoma County by voluntarily conserving energy and water.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION:

FINDING: *The most significant obstacle in convincing businesses to conserve resources is their lack of knowledge about the importance of conservation as well as their lack of knowledge of measures that are currently in place to assist them.*

RECOMMENDATION: *The Business Environmental Alliance should educate Sonoma County business owners and their employees about the current energy and water supply situations in Sonoma County, and inform them of opportunities to reduce their businesses' resource consumption.*

SIMPLICITY:

FINDING: *Many business owners are knowledgeable about the importance of resource conservation but do not take steps to implement conservation practices due to the perceived difficulties involved.*

RECOMMENDATION: *The Business Environmental Alliance should create easily accessible informational resources for businesses to learn more about conservation measures, while also taking steps to streamline the process of participating in resource conservation programs.*

COMMITMENT:

FINDING:

Sonoma County is growing, and will likely continue to do so. Even with minimal growth, resource delivery systems will have a greater difficulty meeting increased demand.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local governments should be encouraged to pass resolutions supporting energy and water conservation efforts and to make General Plan revisions consistent with these resolutions.

I. EDUCATION

SUMMARY

FINDING:

The most significant obstacle in convincing businesses to conserve resources is their lack of knowledge about the importance of conservation as well as their lack of knowledge of measures that are currently in place to assist them.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Business Environmental Alliance should educate Sonoma County business owners and their employees about the current energy and water supply situations in Sonoma County, and inform them of opportunities to reduce their businesses' resource consumption.

Findings:

Focus Group members reported that although numerous educational campaigns currently exist to inform Sonoma County residents and businesses about the importance of resource conservation, many people still lack knowledge about the reasons behind these pleas. While nearly everyone realizes that various agencies want them to conserve energy and water, often the justification for conservation is rarely discussed. A better understanding of the energy and supply issues among Sonoma County residents and businesses would generate a more significant commitment to pursuing conservation practices.

Additionally, members found that even though the owner and management may be committed to the purpose and importance of water and energy conservation, many employees lack a basic understanding of this cause. In fact, in the 2001-02 Business Water Usage Survey, conducted by BEA, 43% of responding business owners indicated that they do not communicate their concern about water conservation issues to their employees. In order to maximize resource conservation, it is important for all users to understand how and why the business is conserving water. This applies to all employees in a business as well as its customers, who should be informed of the business's efforts to conserve and the reasons behind this commitment.

The Focus Group also found that a significant untapped opportunity is available for resource conservation educational programs to reach the development/construction community. This sector has one of the largest potentials to make significant impacts on resource conservation in Sonoma County. If developers and property managers were to take proactive steps to facilitate energy and water conservation while constructing buildings and their environments, much of the time, effort, and money that is devoted to retroactively making these changes could be saved.

Another obstacle currently in place is that many businesses believe that making significant reductions in their water and/or energy use is difficult, costly, and time-consuming. In fact, in most cases effective and worthwhile conservation practices are implemented without the business recognizing that they have done anything out of the ordinary. It is important that businesses realize that even small steps toward conservation are important and significant. The Focus Group found that many Sonoma County businesses are breaking ground in the pursuit of conservation, but do not share their ideas and knowledge with other businesses because the business owners and management do not feel that their simple efforts are worth sharing. In these instances, businesses who could be serving as examples of how facilities can easily and effectively conserve energy and water are not being recognized.

Based upon these findings, the Focus Group recommends the following:

Short-Term Recommendations:

1. BEA should distribute informational materials to candidly discuss the water and energy situations in Sonoma County. This material would include:
 - A. Where Sonoma County's water and energy originate
 - B. How SCWA (wholesaler) works with local retailers to provide water to homes and businesses
 - C. PG&E's role in delivering electricity and natural gas to homes and businesses
 - D. What could occur if businesses do not conserve energy and water
 - E. How much energy and water is available to Sonoma County
 - F. How much energy and water is used in Sonoma County
2. BEA should distribute these materials within various county mailings, including property tax bills, with the goal of reaching as many Sonoma County businesses as possible.
3. BEA should distribute an adequate amount of these materials to businesses to be distributed among employees.
4. BEA should seek to publicize the information from these materials and additional conservation information through media outlets such as the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, the *North Bay Business Journal*, and *Sonoma Business Magazine*, as well as through county trade and service groups and chambers of commerce.
5. BEA should develop specific, voluntary resource conservation guidelines with which Sonoma County businesses may evaluate their own resource conservation efforts.
6. BEA should establish a business recognition program in conjunction with the BEA's *Best Practices Project*. This program would recognize businesses that measure up exceptionally well against the voluntary resource conservation guidelines developed by BEA, rewarding them with publicity and encouraging other businesses to follow their leads.

Long-Term Recommendations:

1. BEA should create an outreach program aimed at developers and property managers in an effort to encourage building with resource conservation in mind.
2. BEA should add a "conservation calculator" to the BEA website, allowing businesses to plug in easily obtainable numbers to determine their rough placement within the frame of established guidelines, and determine what improvements may be made and at what payback time.

II. SIMPLICITY

SUMMARY

FINDING:

Many business owners are knowledgeable about the importance of resource conservation but do not take steps to implement conservation practices due to the perceived difficulties involved.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Business Environmental Alliance should create easily accessible informational resources for businesses to learn more about conservation measures, while also taking steps to streamline the process of participating in resource conservation programs.

Findings:

There are currently a number of programs in place in Sonoma County to assist businesses with resource conservation. Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) currently offers free energy audits to Sonoma County businesses, while the City of Petaluma and the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District offer free water audits to their commercial customers. Additionally, PG&E and SCWA offer rebates on resource-conserving products to businesses and residents alike. Water retailers offer various water conservation incentives as well, such as free low-flow toilets and showerheads and faucet aerators. Finally, PG&E, SCWA, and the various water retailers all have implemented educational programs to inform Sonoma County residents and business owners why they should practice resource conservation and how they can do so easily and effectively.

The Focus Group found, however, that many business owners are not aware of many or all of these conservation programs. In the 2001-02 Business Water Usage Survey, conducted by BEA, approximately one third of responding business owners had not even heard that programs exist to help businesses with their water conservation efforts, demonstrating that efforts to inform businesses about these programs are not reaching at least a significant part of the Sonoma County business community. Additionally, in some cases locating the proper avenues with which to implement these programs often proves to be too difficult and time-consuming for business owners. These many programs and the multitude of information available can be overwhelming for business owners who are already pressed for time. These are significant obstacles to existing resource conservation programs as well as any new programs created to facilitate additional conservation in Sonoma County. Simplifying the various conservation programs will promote greater results.

Based upon these findings, the Focus Group recommends the following:

Recommendations:

1. The BEA should take an inventory of current resource conservation programs available to Sonoma County businesses, identifying their targets and benefits, and present a report to the Board of Supervisors within 12 months.
2. Encourage the collaboration of existing water and energy conservation programs into a coordinated water and energy conservation program, allowing businesses to follow a simpler path to overall conservation and combining the benefits of energy conservation with the benefit of water conservation. This program would serve as Sonoma County's one-stop resource for information pertaining to energy and water conservation, specifically focusing on motivating Sonoma County businesses to conserve resources and providing an information delivery mechanism to inform them of available programs to assist their efforts at water and energy conservation.

III. COMMITMENT

SUMMARY

FINDING:

Sonoma County is growing, and will likely continue to do so. Even with minimal growth, resource delivery systems will have a greater difficulty meeting increased demand.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local governments should be encouraged to pass resolutions supporting energy and water conservation efforts and to make General Plan revisions consistent with these resolutions.

Findings:

The business community in Sonoma County is growing. According to the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, employment in Sonoma County increased annually by 2.2 percent from 1998-2001. Over the same time period, population increased annually by 1.7 percent. However, the county is already consuming nearly its entire water supply each year. In fact, a dry year could bring about water shortages at the current population levels if water use does not decline. Should these population trends continue, and should per capita water use continue at current trends, Sonoma County would be virtually guaranteed to experience regular water shortages during the summer months in the coming years, even during years of average rainfall.

The good news, however, is that it is likely that Sonoma County will maintain an adequate supply of energy during the next few years, even during summer months. This is due to the fact that energy, unlike water, can generally be produced and delivered as needed. Should energy use continue at present rates and population trends remain consistent, it is likely that additional measures of acquiring and delivering energy would be required. These measures could be the production of additional plants or the purchasing of energy from outside entities. Either of these events would likely cause a rise in energy rates for everyone in Sonoma County, making energy conservation a prudent cost-saving method even if it does not command the urgency that water conservation does.

Because of these realities, it is important that the County of Sonoma be committed to reducing its per capita water and energy use in the coming years. With the County leading the way, residences and businesses alike can practice resource conservation not only for their own benefit but as part of a countywide effort.

Based upon these findings, the Focus Group recommends the following:

Recommendations:

1. Pass a resolution supporting proactive energy and water conservation efforts encouraging the reduction of energy and water consumption by Sonoma County businesses.
2. Encourage County of Sonoma and municipal governments to make their General Plan revisions consistent with this resolution.

**Sonoma County Business Resource Conservation Focus Group
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ABOUT THE BEA

BEA Mission Statement

The Business Environmental Alliance (BEA) works to promote the voluntary adoption of good environmental practices by local businesses and farms as a means of improving their financial performance and preserving Sonoma County's environment.

What is the BEA?

Launched in 1995 by the Sonoma County Economic Development Board, the Business Environmental Alliance (BEA) is a public-private partnership that works to promote the economic benefits of sound environmental practices and provide the necessary resources to help mainstream businesses easily implement these measures.

Conferences

1998, 1999, 2000: *Straight to the Bottom Line* annual conference drawing 150-200 business leaders

2000: "Got Water?" Business Water Conference, 100 attendees

2001: "Got Watts? Got Water?" Business Energy and Water Conference, 150 attendees

Current BEA Projects

The 4th Annual *Straight to the Bottom Line Conference*, held June 11, 2002, informed business leaders how to increase their profits through voluntary environmental practices. This year, speakers from Joseph Phelps Vineyards, Agilent Technologies, Clover Stornetta Farms, Bank of America, Cisco Systems, Sonoma State University, Hilton/Doubletree Hotels, and Boulder (CO) Chamber of Commerce highlighted the event.

The Sonoma Valley Business Water Project offers water usage assessments and consultation to high-volume water users and waste producers in the Sonoma Valley. The Project's goal is to ease stress on local utilities through the reduction of water consumption and wastewater production.

The Best Practices Project highlights companies that have enacted voluntary environmental practices and details their actions as well as accompanying cost benefits. Publications include the annually updated *Straight to the Bottom Line: Environmental Best Practices Guide*, the *Voluntary Environmental Practices Self-Assessment Survey*, and the *Business Environmental Progress Report*.

Easy-Access Internet "How-To" and Resource Guides at www.sonoma-county.org/bea that define terms and provide simple directions to help businesses incorporate environmental cost accounting, write an environmental policy statement, and set

Previous Reports and Newsletters

Fall 2001: *Baseline Business Energy Survey & Report*

Winter 2001: *Business Water Usage Survey & Report*

Quarterly since 1997: *Bottom Line Newsletter*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed their valuable time and ideas to this project. Without the help of these individuals, this study would have been difficult to complete.

Most credit for this study belongs to the Focus Group members. Excellent participation and ideas came from all of the members.

Additionally, thanks to Randy Poole, Hal McCutchan, Ali Davidson, and Lynn Hulme from the Sonoma County Water Agency and Dave Imoto, Jim Chabaan, and Randy DeCaminada at Pacific Gas & Electric, all of whom greatly helped the group.

Scott Kirk generously donated his time to chair the Focus Group. He led the meetings and devoted considerable outside time to ensure that they were successful and productive. The Focus Group could not have been successful without his dedication and leadership.

The report was written by Joe Sherman, with considerable assistance from Scott Kirk, Ben Stone, and the rest of the Focus Group. Joe did an excellent job of researching the subjects, planning the meetings, and drafting the report.

Ben Stone
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