

## General Manager's Opinion Editorial *Selective Science Won't Save the Bay*

The recent Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) editorial paints a misleading picture of the Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD) and issues relating to water quality in area waterways.

As the general manager for HRSD, I am disheartened the foundation questions HRSD's commitment to protect water quality and mischaracterizes certain isolated water quality conditions and the scientifically based findings of the federal Chesapeake Bay Program.

HRSD has a long history of responsible environmental stewardship. We are recognized nationally as industry leaders in permit compliance, innovation and commitment to protect the environment. We deeply resent that commitment being questioned.

Years ago we worked with CH2M Hill to develop new technology for nutrient removal. We voluntarily upgraded two of our treatment plants to incorporate that technology and have operated those plants without any regulatory requirement to do so. Since then, Chesapeake Bay Program scientists have shown that the Lower James River and Lower Chesapeake Bay do not have water quality problems related to the current nutrient loadings from HRSD's plants. Therefore, it would be fiscally irresponsible for HRSD to further invest in nutrient removal at this time, since water quality would not improve significantly.

The algae blooms cited by the foundation for Sarah's Creek and the Elizabeth River are the result of stormwater runoff and are clearly unrelated to HRSD. Asserting that HRSD facilities caused these blooms is misleading. Were HRSD facilities causing blooms, the blooms would be widespread rather than occurring inside a small stream (Sarah's Creek) across the York River from our plant. An objective scientific analysis of these blooms clearly points to stormwater runoff as the culprit in these isolated areas and not HRSD.

By focusing on the simple solution of Bay-wide nutrient removal at wastewater treatment facilities, CBF is disregarding well-established science which shows that such a one-size-fits-all approach would be both fiscally and environmentally imprudent. For example, the most serious water quality problem facing the Lower James River and the Lower Chesapeake Bay is suspended sediment from stormwater runoff. The resulting loss of water clarity is adversely affecting the re-establishment of aquatic vegetation and other aquatic life, such as the oyster population.

Also, the public is being misled regarding the most serious challenges in the Bay cleanup. CBF fosters the misconception that nutrient removal at wastewater utilities is the solution to the Bay's water quality problems. Yet, wastewater plants discharge only 20% of the nitrogen entering the Bay. The remaining 80% largely comes from runoff. Unless those sources are addressed, we will spend a lot of public resources and fail to meet the public's expectations concerning water quality.

HRSD will continue to be a steward of the environment as well as our ratepayers' funds. We will continue to hold the line on nutrient levels until a scientifically based need for additional controls is established. In achieving the *Chesapeake 2000 Agreement*, the Bay will be better served by level-headed planning driven by scientific analysis.

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