



Health Department
MULTNOMAH COUNTY OREGON

HEALTH OFFICER

426 SW Stark Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503) 988-3674 phone
(503) 988-3676 fax

Ted Wheeler – County Chair
Deborah Kafoury - District 1 Commissioner
Jeff Cogen – District 2 Commissioner
Judy Shiprack - District 3 Commissioner
Diane McKeel – District 4 Commissioner

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: PURB Members and Other Attendees of March 3 Meeting
FROM: Gary Oxman, MD, MPH, Multnomah County Health Officer
SUBJECT: Clarification of My Comments at March 3 PURB Meeting
DATE: March 11, 2010

I was invited to the March 3, 2010 PURB meeting to provide some comments from a public health perspective on the question of whether Portland's open reservoirs should be covered expeditiously or left open. In the days following the meeting, I have seen my comments cited to support specific policy positions, and have received requests to have my comments used in support other positions.

In light of this, I think it is appropriate to issue a clarification. This memo is based on a review of my notes and of the audio recording of my comments at the meeting.

In my comments, I reviewed my interpretations of some literature and community conversations related to the documented and potential health risks of open reservoirs. I stated that the science of public health tells us relatively little about how to resolve the policy question of whether Portland should cover its existing reservoirs. I also stated my belief that, as a community, we should strive to ensure that all the people of Portland have high-quality drinking water for the next 100 years (as our forebears did 100 years ago).

My intent in making these comments was:

- 1) To point out that the science on documented health impacts alone does not give us a clear and compelling answer to the policy question of whether to cover the reservoirs; and
- 2) To acknowledge the resulting need to consider a variety of factors – e.g., documented and potential health impacts, best public health practices, legal constraints, and assuring broad and enduring community support for the water system – in making this policy decision.

Interpreting my comments in other ways (for example, to construe them as supporting a case that there is no scientific basis for covering the reservoirs) is not consistent with either my words or my intent.

